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THE Nation.

18 MILLION JOBS

HOW OBAMA CAN SAVE HIS PRESIDENCY

BY ROBERT POLLIN

2012

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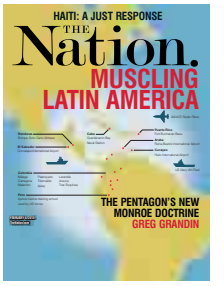

Business as Usual, South of the Border

San Francisco

In what seems like an annual ritual, *Nation* readers are subjected to a feature story like Greg Grandin's "Muscling Latin America" [Feb. 8], which presents a simplistic caricature far removed from the complicated realities of the region. The most ridiculous assertion tries to connect long-planned transportation and energy infrastructure projects in Central America that can only benefit the inhabitants of the isthmus to a conspiracy hatched in the Pentagon to "enlarge the radius of Plan Colombia to create a unified, supranational counterinsurgent infrastructure."

I particularly take issue with the "scandal" Grandin claims US Assistant Secretary of State for Hemispheric Affairs Arturo Valenzuela caused in Argentina in December. I happened to be there during his visit and read of it in a wide range of newspapers. In a media roundtable, Valenzuela pointed out that there is a lack of juridical security in Argentina and hence very little foreign investment. He contrasted this with the 1990s, when Argentina was the recipient of large inflows of US investment capital. (This does not imply approval of the widespread corruption that also characterized the decade.)

Any outcry this reference to the 1990s caused was manufactured by President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner to enhance her popularity among knee-jerk nationalists because her poll ratings have sunk below 20 percent. As for his supposed meeting with "extreme right-wing politicians," Valenzuela met with all those the polls indicate have the best chance to win the 2011 presidential election, including Vice President Julio Cobos.

Thomas Andrew O'Keefe

Grandin Replies

Brooklyn, N.Y.

Thomas Andrew O'Keefe heads the Mercosur Consulting Group, a company that advocates for exactly the kind of "energy infrastructure projects" he says benefit Central America, including ones that would lock the region in as a low-cost biofuel supplier to the United States. I don't believe these projects are hatched in the Pentagon; many of them are dreamt up by consultants like O'Keefe. O'Keefe has called CAFTA an "ideal" model for the rest of Latin America (for a more sober assessment of CAFTA's social and environmental costs, and an alternative economic diplomacy, see Kevin Gallagher's excellent research at the Global Development and Environment Institute at Tufts).

Turning to Argentina, it is unclear what O'Keefe means by a "wide range" of newspapers, since the three largest, *La Nación*, *Clarín* and *Ambito Financiero*, are Fox-like in their uniformity. The less conservative *Página/12* was very critical of Valenzuela's remarks, as any independent observer should be: rather than representing "security," the 1990s were the most corrupt years in Argentine history, leading to massive impoverishment and ballooning external debt. O'Keefe also misrepresents the significance of Valenzuela's meeting with Cobos. In 2008 Cobos broke with President Fernández in her effort to raise taxes on soy exports, which provoked a strong rural backlash financed by Argentina's formidable agro-industry (an analogy would be Joe Biden siding with tea partyers and insurers over healthcare reform). Valenzuela's meeting with Cobos and other questionable politicians—and ignoring moderate opposition leaders like Hermes Binner, the socialist governor of Santa Fe department—sends a message that Washington will continue to block regional efforts to diversify economically and distribute resources more equitably.

Update: human rights activists in Honduras have recently reported up to fifteen new executions; a grave in Colombia containing the remains of perhaps 2,000 people was uncovered in a region where, according to a Colombian lawyer, "a multitude of social leaders, campesinos and community human rights defenders" have "disappeared without a trace"; Human Rights Watch has issued a damning report, *Paramilitaries' Heirs: The New Face of Violence in Colombia*; and when asked if the Colombian free trade agreement would pass Congress this year, Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner said, "Absolutely."

Greg Grandin

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Help Wanted

There is no more robust piece of conventional wisdom in Washington right now than this: Congress and the White House need to "do something" to address the jobs crisis.

EDITORIAL

In the wake of Scott Brown's Massachusetts victory, amid the conflicting messages—scale back the agenda! commit to a bolder agenda!—politicians and pundits across the spectrum were unanimous that delivering jobs is now Washington's job number one. "All of these things," said Rahm Emanuel, referring to the political messages of the past weeks, "all of these things start and lead to one place: J-O-B-S."

And yet. The jobs proposals on the table are paltry. As usual, the House acted first, passing a far smaller than necessary but at least decent jobs package with a price tag of $180 billion. In the Senate, the bipartisan compromise offered by the Finance Committee's Max Baucus and Chuck Grassley came in at $85 billion, $31 billion of which consisted of tax cuts with no job-creating justification (including an estate tax repeal that would benefit the richest 0.25 percent of households). So egregious was the bill that majority leader Harry Reid scratched it once its details were announced, replacing it with a $15 billion bill that still does less than the absolute bare minimum necessary.

It's difficult to overstate just how mismatched such proposals are with the scale of the crisis. As Robert Pollin notes in this week's cover story, we need to create somewhere near 18 million jobs over the next three years to get the economy back to full employment. Viewed in this context, the math is damning. By conservative estimates, last year's $787 billion recovery act is set to deliver 2.5 million jobs, but that leaves a gap of at least 10 million more jobs just to get back to pre-recession levels; and it is scheduled to taper off just as unemployment peaks. By leveraging $700 billion in private sector investment as Pollin suggests, we can probably create the needed jobs with an additional $200 billion in federal funds to shore up state and local governments. Yet here we are, talking about $15 billion. Imagine for a moment the reaction on the Sunday talk-shows if, after President Obama called for 20,000 more troops in Afghanistan, Congress approved spending for just 333.

As wrenching as it is, the unemployment crisis is not a policy problem without a policy solution, as Pollin persuasively demonstrates. The problem is politics. The deficit fearmongers have a stranglehold on the debate. At the same time, however, over the next few years the single most important political imperative for the White House and the Democratic Party is lowering the jobless rate. And despite the obstacles, there is a lot they can do to make this happen. For one thing, as Pollin notes, the Fed could use its sway to bring the banks on board.

But the proposals offered here could also be put to Congress, creating a series of difficult votes for the opposition. A bill that would require banks to lend more of their reserves for productive investments and small-business job creation—or, better yet, one that would tax their "excess" reserves—would be hard to oppose in an election year. Since much of the agenda revolves around leveraging private investment, promising coalitions could be assembled: small business associations should be happy to see the government expand loan guarantees, to choose but one example. To avoid death by filibuster, each jobs bill could be run through reconciliation, since each will almost certainly have a "substantial budgetary effect." The political case for ambitious federal action on jobs is nearly as compelling as the moral case.

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Greek Drama

The knot, as we say in Greece, has finally reached the comb. The economic crisis that is exercising bankers, Eurocrats and the European media has been decades in the making; the country's litany of woes trips easily off Greek tongues, from graft to tax evasion, from creative accounting to a gargantuan, hungry public sector, from capital flight to a chronic lack of development policy. But the pressure on George Papandreou's socialist government, not yet five months old, to fix it all by yesterday is a product of the wider recession and the global financial meltdown. If Greece defaults on its loans, the argument goes, this will further depress the euro (already being dragged under by circling speculators) and suggest the nightmare scenario of domino defaults, currency defections in the euro zone and the collapse of the whole implausible enterprise, which Timothy Garton Ash once called a "hair-raising adventure…of unification through money."

COMMENT

Radical economic reform is long overdue in Greece, for the sake of those who live there rather than Europe's bankers. The holes in the fabric are becoming painfully obvious: for months now hospital suppliers have gone unpaid, as have university lecturers and other public employees. Farmers, long dependent on subsidies in the absence of any rural development plan, blockaded the roads this winter with the tractors they use to grow the crops they can't sell for a living wage. The rot goes all the way back to the early days of the state, when votes were routinely rewarded with civil service sinecures; some 30 percent of Greeks now work in the public sector, with jobs guaranteed for life. The culture of graft is endemic and paying taxes is for fools, while immigrant-bashing and scaremongering about the Republic of Macedonia stand in for patriotism.

Every Greek government since the 1980s has in effect colluded in the black economy; but then, so have Brussels and the banks. Greece joined the euro in 2000 on the basis of cooked books and a brief boom built on the labor of the first migrants from Albania and Eastern Europe. According to the *New York Times*, Goldman Sachs was on the scene by 2001, setting up secret schemes to mask the deficit. The Athens Olympics in 2004, hailed as the rebranding of the new hub of the Balkans, cost the country some $11.6 billion, roughly 5 percent of that year's GDP.

Greeks are desperate for change, at least in theory: Papandreou was elected on a platform of transparency, accountability and reform by a population sick to death of corruption, incompetence and lucrative government scams, which the previous administration took to dramatic new heights of virtuosity. Greece has not asked for a bailout; the government's plan features a restructuring of the tax system, a crackdown on tax evasion, pay cuts for public sector workers including government ministers, pension reform, a public sector hiring freeze and a one-to-five replacement rate for retiring civil servants. But even these measures may not be enough for the EU's finance ministers, who as I write are demanding deeper cuts and tighter control over the Greek economy.

So far, reaction in Greece to the proposed austerity measures has been muted, even numb. The one-day strike called by public

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sector unions on February 10 was a mere face-saving exercise; though there are more to come, the dire predictions in the European press of riots and military coups are wildly exaggerated. Most of the unions support the ruling PaSoK party. Their loyalty has limits, but it gives Papandreou some leeway. And as a low-paid friend in the public sector put it, "What good does it do to strike when it just means the government gets to keep my pay?" There's been no sign of the kids who took to the streets in December 2008 after a 15-year-old was shot dead by police; that was a spontaneous uprising against politics as usual, the lack of a viable future, a government that combined indifference with repression. The pensioners and civil servants who stood under their umbrellas in the pouring rain are as frightened as they are angry. Northern Europeans may scoff at the Greeks' easy ride, but many of those who will be most affected by the cuts already work two or three jobs to make ends meet, to get their children the extra tuition they need to be employable, to pay Parisian prices on Athenian wages; nor does the struggle end when they "retire." Though they are not the ones who have profited from the system, they'll have to foot the bill.

Of course, the mood may change if Brussels tightens the thumbscrews and Greek self-determination—and, by implication, the self-determination of the rest of Europe's periphery—is shown to be a sham. Greece's entry into the EU in 1981 marked a recognition of its return to democracy after the fall of the military dictatorship seven years before. It will be an ugly irony if it must now be ruled by bankers and politicians its people did not elect.

MARIA MARGARONIS

Athens: The First Domino?

Justice will not come to Athens until those who are not injured are as indignant as those who are injured. —*Thucydides*

The shadow of classical Greece has always loomed large over Western civilization—whether in literature, philosophy, art, mathematics, history or politics, it has been, in so many ways, the *fons et origo* of us all. Modern Greece suddenly seems poised to play that same outsized role, but by no means in the same civilizing way. Athens's fiscal crisis could very well ignite the next global financial crisis—just as the world hoped it might be starting a slow exit from the last one.

COMMENT

After meeting with fellow European leaders in Brussels in early February, where he argued the case for help in solving the hefty budget deficit he'd inherited on taking office last fall, Prime Minister George Papandreou flew home to Athens to tell his countrymen that he'd returned with a half-full cup of promises—and no assurance of the serious backing Greece needs to weather its woes. Global markets, which had been fibrillating nervously for three months about Greece's (and the euro's) financial health, skipped several beats after Papandreou's speech, after already suffering a long sell-off that wiped out much of Wall Street's shaky recovery. All eyes are anxiously casting about for Delphic signs of what Europe's finance ministers will do when they meet to hear Greece make its case again, this time in hard numbers.

Noted.

WOMEN'S WORK: After several years of bickering among UN members over the creation of a new agency for women, Secretary General **Ban Ki-moon** laid out a blueprint in early February for action in the General Assembly. **Charlotte Bunch**, a leader of **GEAR** (Gender Equality Architecture Reform), a coalition of some 300 groups worldwide, and **Julia Greenberg**, associate director of **AIDS-Free World**, an organization that battles women's vulnerability to the disease, both point to potential pitfalls in the plan, which they and other women's advocates nevertheless support as a good starting point. The concerns include the limited powers the agency would have in dealing with governments, weaker links to nongovernmental groups than the solid partnership proposed earlier by UN officials and the $500 million budget for the agency, only half of what advocates have demanded.

Now the horse-trading begins. Some developing nations, among them Muslim governments cool to the idea of elevating the role of women in UN work, will want more attention to development funding and other reforms in return for their support for the agency, to be headed by an under secretary general not yet chosen. Hopes are high that the Obama team—reversing Bush's opposition and working with other states committed to strengthening women's rights—will lead efforts to hold the line against further whittling away of the agency's funding and mission. The question now, says Greenberg, is whether countries who want a strong new agency will fight for it.

BARBARA CROSSETTE

BYE BAYH! Never one for social or political niceties, RNC chair **Michael Steele** declared that Indiana Senator **Evan Bayh** and other centrist Democrats were "running for the hills because they sold out their constituents and don't want to face them at the ballot box." In fact, Bayh and other key members of the corporate-friendly DLC did sell their constituents out—with steady support for the free-trade agenda that has battered manufacturing industries.

In the 2008 primary **Barack Obama** and **Hillary Clinton** acknowledged the failure of the free-trade agenda by campaigning in Indiana as critics of NAFTA. Yet Bayh has kept shilling for Wall Street. Bayh made it politically on the power of his last name—his father, Birch, was an iconic figure in politics—and his prodigious fundraising from business interests. (A member of the Banking Committee, he collected more than $1.2 million from securities and investment interests during this cycle.) But Democrats won't be able to win his Indiana seat or key open seats in Illinois, Missouri and Ohio with a soft centrist message. They will do so only with a populism that addresses double-digit unemployment and rapid deindustrialization while telling swing voters they are right to be angry about bank bailouts and insider deals.

JOHN NICHOLS

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The situation has the makings of an Aeschylean tragedy. If help isn't forthcoming, little Greece—whose economy is just 3 percent of Europe's GDP—could, against its will, set off a chain reaction that pulls down Portugal, Ireland, Spain, perhaps even Italy, and thereby throws Europe's, and then America's and the rest of the world's, fragile recoveries into reverse.

The crisis is, in classic Greek fashion, ripe with ironies. Papandreou came to office in October determined to clean up his country's longstanding fiscal recklessness and widespread corruption. It was he who first exposed the scope of the dilemma immediately after discovering that this year's deficit would be double what his conservative predecessors had promised. Moreover, Papandreou has consistently insisted that his government will keep the promises it has made to Greek voters and to EU auditors to bring the deficit, now almost 13 percent of GDP, down to less than 9 percent this coming year and to the EU-mandated ceiling of just 3 percent within two more. But traders and speculators, sensing the size of the task the government faces, have forced interest rates on Greek bonds to record highs, betting that the country is close to default. (The traders' role is itself ripe with ironies because Goldman Sachs and other top Wall Street firms had earlier in the decade helped Greek governments move liabilities off state budgets by constructing the same sort of offshore entities and complex derivative swaps that were at the heart of the US banking system's collapse a year and a half ago. Revelations of the deals by the *New York Times* generated new attacks on the Papandreou government, despite the fact that it was his government that had exposed the dealings.)

The question, as one very anxious European banker told me, is "whether Greece will be the Bear Stearns of sovereign credit."

Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

Foreign Aid

Wall Street tactics akin to the ones that fostered subprime mortgages in America have worsened the financial crisis shaking Greece and undermining the euro.... One deal created by Goldman Sachs helped obscure billions in debt from the budget overseers in Brussels. —*The New York Times*

The Goldman folks said, "Greeks, you're set:
We'll show you how to hide your debt—
And quietly, without a fuss.
It worked at home—at least for us."

In all the world—across the sea
Or in the tropics—could there be
One closed-door shady deal that lacks
Conspirators from Goldman Sachs?

Greece's outstanding debt is more than Bear Stearns's $400 billion balance sheet exposure in 2008, before its collapse—but there the analogy ends. Greece is a sovereign nation, not a company, and it isn't going bankrupt, not least because its currency is the euro, shared by 320 million Europeans and backed by an economy larger than America's. But if it is forced into debt rescheduling and renegotiation, Greece could well spark a panicky stampede.

What makes this crisis especially painful is not just that we've seen it happen before but that its solution is far less complicated. What Athens needs are the funds to service the gap between its revenue and its obligations, a net deficit that gets smaller each week as it carries out the painful cuts needed to bring its budget back to the EU's mandated standards. Public sector salaries, from the prime minister's on down, have been slashed; hiring has in effect been frozen; civil service retirement ages pushed up and benefits reduced; and social services and the military budget are being curtailed across the board. For Greeks it is an excruciating moment. Despite a nationwide strike called for later in February, opinion polls show the majority still favor Papandreou's painful choices.

Moreover, unlike Wall Street bankers, Papandreou isn't asking for a bailout (let alone a bonus for himself or senior ministers); what he wants is help stabilizing the market for Greece's bonds. And unlike Wall Street in the fall of 2008, Athens isn't being frozen out of the credit markets; in fact, it is still able to borrow. Its most recent 5 billion euro bond offering was actually oversubscribed by 20 billion, which allowed the government to increase the offering by a healthy 3 billion euros. Moreover, with unprecedentedly low global interest rates, Athens is paying 5 to 6.5 percent on medium-term bonds. That's not cheap, but it's far below what other small countries have paid in similar circumstances.

But Wall Street speculators have swarmed in, playing Greece, as the *Financial Times* put it, "like a piñata." The country's tiny bond market—barely a billion euros a day were trading in Athens in January—makes an easy and tempting target for traders with big bats; by attacking Greek bonds, the traders get to play on an increasingly pan-European volatility in bond and currency rates, thereby leveraging a little nation's problems into gigantic trading-floor gains. And thanks to the Obama administration's repeated refusal to limit such activities—despite pleas from our European allies since 2008 to jointly reregulate global financial markets—what the traders are doing is legal. In fact, massive immediate trading profits are the means by which banks like Goldman, Citi, JPMorgan, Barclays, UBS and Deutsche Bank are rebuilding their balance sheets without providing the lending the real economies of America and Europe need to begin their recovery.

Athens desperately needs the maneuvering room that visible European support would provide by driving off the speculators and letting Papandreou's government focus on domestic restructuring. That needn't cost wary German, Dutch or French governments and their taxpayers billions; to the contrary, Berlin, Amsterdam and Paris could snuff out, at quite low cost, the smoldering coals before the real fire breaks out, and with very little risk. Europe could, for example, put up no money and simply offer to guarantee Greek bonds, much as the FDIC raised its guarantees to US banks and then extended them to

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President Obama is right.

It is time to end “don’t ask, don’t tell.”

More than 13,000 Americans, who volunteered to serve and defend our country, have been discharged under the unnecessary and unjust “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy. Discrimination has no place in any American institution. During a time of two wars, this policy undermines our national security and the effectiveness of our military. It requires the discharge of trained, essential members of military units. It requires dishonesty. And it promotes a misguided notion that some Americans are not entitled to full equality.

Across the globe, our allies – including Britain, Canada, France and Israel – have demonstrated that openly gay and lesbian personnel are as effective fighting the enemy as anyone else in military service. Our military will be stronger when we stop a policy that denies talented men and women the opportunity to serve our country with honesty. Institutional discrimination undermines the spirit of equality that has shaped our country throughout its history. It offends our deepest values. It is time for Congress to act quickly to bring this relic of bigotry to an end.

Equality should not be denied to any group of Americans. AFSCME is proud of the role we have played in working to end discrimination. For thirty years, we have fought to eliminate discrimination against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Americans. Our strength lies in our diversity. We support President Obama’s effort to change a destructive policy. It is time to end “don’t ask, don’t tell.”

AFSCME
We Make America Happen

Photo of former U.S. Army Sergeant Darren Manzella courtesy of the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network. Sergeant Manzella served two tours of duty in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. He was discharged under “don’t ask, don’t tell” in June of 2008.

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money market funds after Lehman collapsed in 2008. European governments—with deep pockets and long time horizons—could also help by buying some of the bonds and encouraging public and private banks to do likewise. The $15 billion in EU development funds Greece is eligible to receive could be expedited and expanded, with no new burden on Europe's taxpayers.

The price of not acting now is high—and not just for Greece. For Europe it means a fiscal and credit domino effect among weakened EU economies, driving borrowing costs even higher for the prudent and profligate alike. For America, a weakened euro—which has already fallen almost 10 percent against the dollar over the past three months—means a rising dollar. That, in turn, means a rising US trade deficit—not the best strategy for helping America escape its own crisis, let alone meet President Obama's dreamy goal of doubling US exports in the next five years.

The scale of what's happening has suddenly dawned on even the most conservative European skeptics. Ambrose Evans-Pritchard, the influential English financial columnist, stopped his long diatribe against Greece's fiscal policies and called for European aid. *The Economist*'s Athens correspondent, who's been no less relentless, has also suddenly switched views, while the *Financial Times*, after excoriating the Papandreou government for not making cuts so deep they would guarantee a depression, suddenly has awakened to the dangerous game that traders are playing and the risks it poses for everyone.

With so many at last realizing just what Greeks bearing a bitter gift of sovereign default could ultimately do to us all, there's still reason to hope that we may not yet be facing Global Financial Crisis 2.0.

RICHARD PARKER

Richard Parker, a Nation *editorial board member, is an Oxford-trained macroeconomist at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. He serves as an adviser to Prime Minister Papandreou.*

Welcome, 'Sister Citizen'

We are pleased to announce that this issue marks the debut of Melissa Harris-Lacewell's column, "Sister Citizen." An associate professor of politics and African-American studies at Princeton University, Harris-Lacewell has contributed to the *Nation* blog The Notion for the past year, taking on such topics as the tea party protests, Obama's Nobel Prize, racial profiling, the death of Michael Jackson and healthcare reform. She is the author of the award-winning book *Barbershops, Bibles and BET: Everyday Talk and Black Political Thought*, and in 2009 she became the youngest scholar to deliver the W.E.B. Du Bois Lectures at Harvard University.

Harris-Lacewell's column shares its title with her forthcoming book, *Sister Citizen: A Text for Colored Girls Who've Considered Politics When Being Strong Wasn't Enough*, and will explore the changing meanings of race, gender, faith and citizenship in the twenty-first century. Readers may be familiar with Harris-Lacewell from her frequent appearances on *The Rachel Maddow Show* and *Countdown With Keith Olbermann*, where she brings her lively and dynamic teaching style to millions of viewers. Harris-Lacewell has a BA in English from Wake Forest University, a PhD in political science from Duke University and an honorary doctorate from Meadville Lombard Theological School. She is a student at Union Theological Seminary in New York. Her column will appear monthly.

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Concerned about the future of media? Watch highlights from *The Nation*'s panel **The Death and Life of American Journalism**, with John Nichols, Robert W. McChesney, David Carr and Pamela Newkirk.

We've got new podcasts: **Cover Story**, editors' and writers' weekly quick take on breaking news and big stories, and **Nation Conversations**, audio highlights from *Nation* events. Plus, catch **The Breakdown** with Christopher Hayes every Friday.

In honor of Black History Month, we have collected the best of *The Nation*'s coverage of the civil rights struggle.

Watch Washington editor Christopher Hayes on *The Rachel Maddow Show* proposing four ways to get rid of the filibuster.

In a **Radio Tour of Tea Party Nation**, Gary Younge heads to rural Arkansas and Kentucky to understand how local opposition to Obama's agenda explains a growing national movement.

* The online slide show **Faces of the Media-Lobbying Complex**, which accompanied the March 1 cover story (Sebastian Jones, "The Media-Lobbying Complex"), began with an image of Governor Howard Dean from his appearance as a guest host on MSNBC's *Countdown*. The slide show featured lobbyists who appeared on TV news as analysts without disclosing their corporate affiliations, and in that context it may have created the false impression that Dean is a lobbyist or that he used his *Countdown* appearance to promote his law firm's clients. Neither is true in Dean's case. The article included only one sentence about Dean, whose law firm consults for pharmaceutical companies, and did not suggest that Dean had done anything unethical. But MSNBC, by having him host *Countdown* without disclosing his firm's consultancy, created a potential conflict of interest of which viewers were unaware. As the article points out, the practice is commonplace at all TV news networks, which bear the ultimate journalistic responsibility.

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Katha Pollitt

What Ever Happened to Candidate Obama?

How disappointed are the Obama warriors of 2008? "May your love for me not fade as quickly as your love for Obama," read one pale pink e-card making the rounds on Valentine's Day. Obama himself addressed the topic of a one-term presidency in a recent interview with Diane Sawyer, albeit in a noble, idealistic, theoretical way ("I'd rather be a really good one-term president than a mediocre two-term president"). Well, OK, who wouldn't rather be really good for four years than mediocre for eight; but how many really good one-term presidents have there been? (Only one—James K. Polk—according to a *New York Times* op-ed by Robert W. Merry, publisher of Stratfor and author of a biography of, well, James K. Polk.)

I'm still glad I supported Obama over Hillary Clinton. If Hillary had won the election, every single day would be a festival of misogyny. We would hear constantly about her voice, her laugh, her wrinkles, her marriage and what a heartless, evil bitch she is for doing something—whatever!—men have done since the Stone Age. Each week would bring its quotient of pieces by fancy women writers explaining why they were right not to have liked her in the first place. Liberal pundits would blame her for discouraging the armies of hope and change, for bringing back the same-old same-old cronies and advisers, for letting healthcare reform get bogged down in inside deals, for failing to get out of Iraq and Afghanistan—which would be attributed to her being a woman and needing to show toughness—for cozying up to Wall Street, deferring to the Republicans and ignoring the cries of the people. In other words, for doing pretty much what Obama is doing. This way I get to think, Whew, at least you can't blame this on a woman.

I'm not even sure how much of it you can blame on Obama. We've had ample evidence of how little power he has over the Democratic barons of the Senate—so little that he had to bribe Ben Nelson and Mary Landrieu with great big haunches of pork to get their votes on a healthcare bill that would benefit millions of their constituents. He is trying to bring some of the Guantánamo prisoners to trial on the US mainland, and Democrats like Jim Webb have sold him out. The Republicans have made clear their intention to obstruct his every move, and thanks to antidemocratic customs like the filibuster and the Senate hold, they've done a pretty good job so far. These are basic features of the landscape.

But let's not go overboard. The real-world constraints on what Obama can do are considerable. (Thank you, founding fathers, for setting up the Senate so that white, rural, conservative states with the population of Staten Island get the same two senators each as multiethnic urban powerhouses like California and New York. That little gift to the slave states of 1788 continues its antidemocratic work today.) But he is, after all, the president. He can propose, he can set forth an agenda, he can demand. He can ask for more than he knows he can get, he can push the boundaries. He doesn't have to do the Republicans' work for them—by asking for a smaller stimulus than necessary, by having the bulk of healthcare reform not kick in until 2014 to keep costs down, by praising obscenely rich bankers as "very savvy businessmen" to a nation with a 9.7 percent official unemployment rate. It's as if the Blue Dogs have gotten into his head, and instead of thinking how to push the possibilities to the max, he's thinking how he can placate his opponents in advance. Right now, the story of healthcare reform suggests that this is not possible—it simply enables a fresh set of even more egregious demands.

It's true that Obama was elected with the votes of many independents and some Republicans, and he has to respect that or end up building houses with Jimmy Carter. Lots of people were inspired by his promise to transcend party differences and take what was best from both Democrats and Republicans—I never understood it, because from my perspective Republicans have nothing to offer; but he did say it, and people took it seriously. A year later, though, those independents are leaving his side in droves, and with the possible exception of ordinary people of color, the base—prochoice women, labor, civil rights activists, opponents of war, progressives, leftists, civil libertarians—is demoralized. His poll numbers may be above 50 percent (although as I write a CNN poll shows a majority opposing a second term). But passable polls don't measure enthusiasm, and enthusiasm is what gets people to write checks they can't really afford, give up their vacations to knock on doors, spend their evenings phone-banking and push their friends to vote. It's easy to dismiss progressives as insignificant and dreamy or, as Rahm Emanuel put it, "fucking retarded." But Obama won't get re-elected without them. They are the troops.

During the campaign Obama was often attacked as being all airy speeches and noble rhetoric. Maybe he took that criticism too much to heart and made the mistake of trying to rack up accomplishments quickly through wonkery and compromise and deal-making, the normal things politicians do—only unfortunately the Republicans aren't interested in governing, and the Blue Dogs are mostly interested in themselves. We'll never know what would have happened if he'd continued to call on the better angels of our nature—if, for example, he'd presented healthcare reform as social solidarity, if he'd made people really feel the suffering of others and called upon them to right this terrible wrong. Maybe people—including progressives—wouldn't have been so easily discouraged and disillusioned by the inevitable complications and imperfections of the plan itself.

What is the point of Obama being conciliatory and careful if his opponents are reckless and don't want to conciliate? Why not use this awful moment when so many are losing their jobs and houses, and states are cutting services to the bone, to remind people why they voted for him? ■

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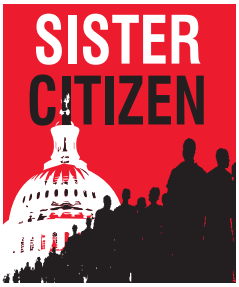
Melissa Harris-Lacewell

Save the Child

Although I was shaken and distressed by the scale of human suffering, I forced myself to watch hours of Haitian earthquake coverage. I remembered how many turned away from the televised abandonment of black people in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. I did not want to commit that same betrayal by turning off the television. I wanted to bear witness to this tragedy, which affected so many black people.

I finally had to stop watching when I saw dozens of dead schoolchildren. One little face looked too much like my own daughter's.

Many people have a visceral reaction to children's agony. The innocence of youth makes their suffering particularly hard to bear. I understand wanting to swoop in, to scoop up the kids and to whisk them away to a better place. These are the emotions that seemingly motivated the American missionaries who attempted to relocate dozens of Haitian children to an orphanage in the Dominican Republic. Arrested and accused of child trafficking, they maintain that their intentions were entirely benevolent. But many of these Haitian children, it turns out, had surviving parents and relatives—a fact that the missionaries either knew about and disregarded or never bothered to investigate in the first place. Rather than viewing these kin as the children's best resources in a time of disaster and loss, the missionaries sought to save the children in isolation from the restoration of their nation.



The desire to save the children might be noble, but this definition of salvation implies that familial, communal, linguistic and cultural connections are irrelevant. It assumes that a life of relative privilege is always preferable to a life of poverty, and it denies that children are bound to their origins by ties of loyalty, experience and preference. This troubling political impulse can be seen in the feel-good movie of the season, *The Blind Side*, based on the true story of a feisty Southern white woman who rescues an African-American teenager by adopting him out of poverty. Its roots go back to early twentieth-century progressive reformers who supported an aggressive "Indian education" agenda in the belief that efficient intervention in children's lives was key to developing a productive, temperate citizenry. From the 1880s through the 1920s, more than 100,000 American Indian children were removed from tribal reservations and educated in government-supported, church-operated boarding schools. "Kill the Indian, save the man," was the explicit cultural extermination mission of child-salvation efforts that banned contact with parents and forbade tribal languages.

From the Haitian adoption scandal to Indian education programs, save-the-children logic defines black, brown, immigrant and poor communities as harbingers of cultural and behavioral pathologies. It demarcates children's interests separately from, sometimes in opposition to, those of the adults in their communities.

There was a similar rationale to Education Secretary Arne Duncan's blithe assertion that Hurricane Katrina was "the best thing that happened to the education system in New Orleans." I was in New Orleans the day before Duncan made his comment. I had just watched as dozens of high school students raised their hands when asked, "Who here has been personally touched by violent crime in our city?" Certainly there have been demonstrable improvements in the city's test scores, but Duncan's rosy assessment was discordant with what these kids were reporting about the difficulties they face. They live with rampant violent crime. There is little organized recreation. They have inadequate healthcare and few employment opportunities. Duncan myopically assumes that children can be saved solely through schools, but the children of New Orleans need more than a proliferation of charter schools; they need safe streets, open parks and parents who have real economic opportunities.

Likewise, I watched with interest and concern as First Lady Michelle Obama launched her national initiative to combat childhood obesity, an effort well suited to her self-proclaimed role as mom in chief. In its current form, Mrs. Obama's initiative is focused on providing nutrition information, improving food choices and encouraging physical exercise. The program establishes a competition for healthier schools and offers information about "food deserts." But it does not rigorously engage a policy agenda that embraces children as part of nutritionally and recreationally deficient communities. Since race and poverty are intimately linked to childhood obesity, it is easy to imagine that this effort could soon slip into rhetoric about saving kids from their deep-frying, sedentary parents rather than linking health to the government and corporate choices that affect both children and adults.

Of course, progressive policies should take the needs of children seriously. Child-centered advocacy can be pursued in ways that are politically savvy and ethically sound. The Children's Defense Fund, for example, uses children's welfare as a tool to influence structural issues like reproductive health, criminal justice reform, housing policy and economic development. But it is important to guard against an impulse to save children that ignores the structural inequalities that made their salvation necessary in the first place. Presenting children as uniquely worthy implies that disadvantaged adults deserve their misery. It further implies that the private choices of irresponsible adults, rather than the policies of governments and corporations, are primarily responsible for children's suffering.

It is easy to feel good about charitable efforts to assist disadvantaged children. But the desire to help children can create its own blind side, allowing us to ignore the communities from which they emerge and the racist and classist assumptions about who deserves assistance—and who doesn't. ■

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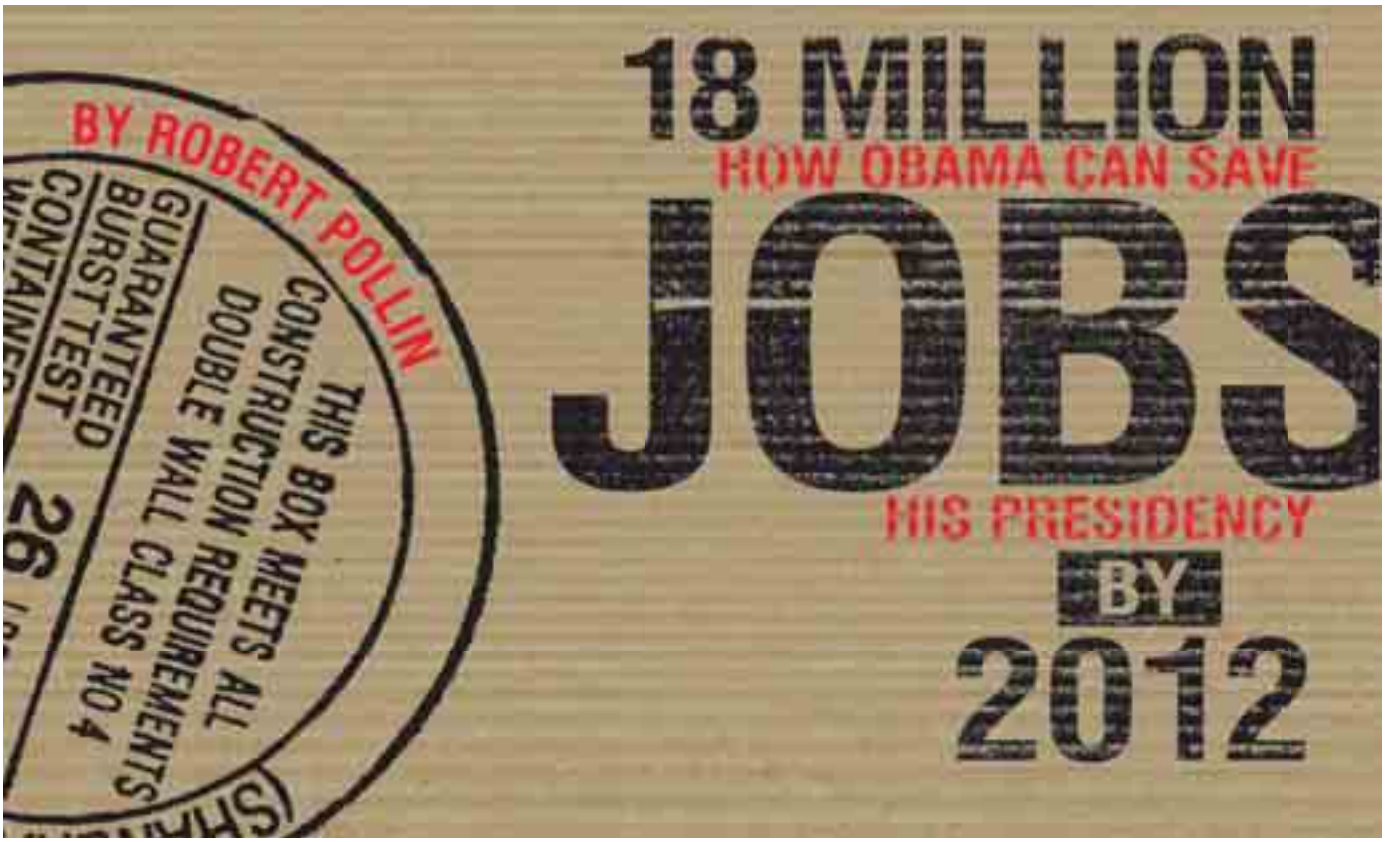

Unemployment in the United States stands officially at 9.7 percent. This represents 14.8 million people out of work. By a broader official measure that includes people employed fewer hours than they would like and those discouraged from looking for work, the unemployment rate is 16.5 percent, or about 25 million people in a total labor force of about 153 million. We have not seen comparable unemployment rates since 1983, twenty-seven years ago, and before that, not since the 1930s Depression.

The job-creation proposals coming from the Obama administration, in the president's January 27 State of the Union address and elsewhere, generally point in the right direction, with more spending for clean energy, infrastructure and support for small businesses. These proposals follow from Obama's February 2009 economic recovery program, which injected $787 billion in new spending or tax relief into the economy over two years. However, just as last February's stimulus program was too small to counteract the evaporation of $16 trillion in household wealth resulting from the financial collapse, the scope of Obama's current proposals is nowhere near large enough for the situation today.

For example, Obama has proposed $33 billion in new tax credits for small businesses. By contrast, private borrowing by businesses over the previous six months was down by $1.5 trillion relative to 2007, with the largest proportional cutbacks coming from small businesses. What's more, Obama's call to freeze discretionary federal spending in nonmilitary areas is dangerously misguided. The fiscal deficits of 2009 and 2010—at between $1.4 trillion and $1.6 trillion, or around 10 percent of GDP—are indeed very large. But the freeze obscures what Obama and his advisers clearly know—that deficit spending is part of the solution to our economic predicament and will remain so until we see millions of people getting hired into decent jobs.

Here is what we need: a commitment from the Obama administration to create 18 million new jobs over the remaining three years of the presidential term. That would mean an average increase of about 500,000 jobs per month, or a bit more than 4 percent growth in job creation over the next three years. This can be done by combining two broad types of initiatives: measures to buttress the economy's floor and thereby prevent another 2008-type collapse, and measures to inject job-generating investments into the economy. If such initiatives are successful, the official unemployment rate will stand at around 4 percent when Obama runs for re-election in November 2012.

Is This Realistic?

The central features of this plan can remain within the framework of proposals already established by the administration. The key is getting the scale large enough. The only way this can happen is by combining the positive energies of the public and private sectors. This public-private approach is not only practically necessary; it will also counteract right-wing claims that the government is seizing control of the economy in the name of job creation. Most of the financial heft will

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have to come from banks and other private financial institutions. The banks alone are hoarding cash reserves totaling about $850 billion in their accounts at the Federal Reserve. Most of that money needs to be channeled into job-generating investments. For this to happen, interest rates and the risks for lending to small businesses need to fall substantially.

But it will be necessary for the government to keep injecting spending into the economy, which will add to the deficit. Scare stories aside, the fiscal deficit is not dangerously large. The interest rates the government is paying on its borrowing—as opposed to the rates that businesses have to pay on much riskier loans—remain historically low, in the range of 2 to 3 percent. This is because the world's financial magicians of just a few years ago have chosen to protect their remaining wealth by buying up the safest possible assets they can find, which are US Treasury bonds. When Ronald Reagan was running up record-breaking deficits in the early 1980s, the interest rates on the bonds were around 13 percent.

This huge gap in interest rates between now and the Reagan era will save the Treasury about $175 billion per year going forward. Also remember that falling unemployment rates reduce the deficit on their own, with each 1 percent drop generating about $90 billion in government revenues or reduced spending obligations. This is because when people are newly employed, they can support themselves and pay more taxes. We also need workers earning decent wages. Even if we didn't care about the ever-widening inequalities of wages, incomes and wealth, we would still need working people to have enough money in their pockets to boost sagging consumer markets. Conversely, when unemployment rises, the government is faced with huge extra spending burdens through unemployment insurance, food stamps, Medicaid and related social safety net commitments. The fiscal deficit could probably be eliminated altogether if unemployment could be driven down to around 4 percent, even without spending cuts or increases in tax rates. Finally, we can extract about $300 billion in savings and new revenues by ending the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and by establishing a modest tax on speculative Wall Street trading.

One argument against taking bold measures now is that, mass unemployment aside, the official indicators tell us that the recession is over. The economy did grow at a robust 5.7 percent over the past quarter, though that may be only a short-term blip, driven by businesses restocking their depleted inventories. But let's assume that a recovery is indeed under way at more or less the normal rate of progress relative to recent recessions. In fact, under such a "normal" scenario, unemployment would not likely fall to around 5 percent until early 2017. We would not likely hit 4 percent unemployment until mid-2018, assuming the recovery could be kept going for another eight years.

Even with a successful coordination of large-scale expansions of private and public spending, is it realistic to expect that the economy, which has been so trampled down for the past three years, could possibly create 18 million jobs over the next three years? It is an ambitious but realistic goal. This is basically the rate at which employment grew under Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter coming out of the 1974–75 recession. The Carter years are widely derided through the lens of his 1979 "malaise" speech. Yet the first three years under Carter generated the fastest expansion of job opportunities of any comparable period since, including any three-year stretch under Reagan or Clinton.

The Carter presidency, of course, ended disastrously with the severe 1980 recession. But this was because OPEC and the oil companies doubled oil prices between 1979 and 1980. Even more important, Wall Street insisted at the time that Carter appoint Paul Volcker as chair of the Federal Reserve to stop the inflation that resulted from the oil price shock. Volcker immediately raised short-term interest rates, pushing them as high as 17 percent by April 1980. This brought unemployment up to 7.5 percent in time for Reagan's landslide victory over Carter in November 1980. (It is ironic that among Obama's top tier of economic advisers, the same Paul Volcker is taking the hardest line against Wall Street excesses.)

Is 18 million jobs in three years realistic? It's basically the rate of employment growth under Ford and Carter after the 1974–75 recession.

Of course, we need to control inflation, especially when it results from oil price jumps. But we can do this by getting serious about energy conservation and new renewable energy sources, as well as being prepared to release our strategic oil reserves as needed, to force oil prices back down amid a crisis. Pushing unemployment down to around 4 percent will also provoke inflation fears because it is likely to bring wage increases, as workers' bargaining power improves. But rising wages do not cause inflation on their own, as long as wage increases are in line with how much workers produce on the job. Also recall that the average wage today is about 10 percent below its peak level of 1972, even though average worker productivity has risen by about 90 percent since the early 1970s. In short, now is the time to focus on creating 18 million decent jobs and not to remain fixated—as we were from Volcker's 1979 appointment until the 2008 financial collapse—on fears of moderately rising inflation.

Reducing the Pain

Mass unemployment creates widespread human suffering. Minimizing this suffering has to be the first priority in fighting the recession. Helping people in need also contributes to

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countering a downward recessionary spiral and thus helps prevent another collapse. In general, the Obama administration has done reasonably well on this front, but the demands are great. More than 3 million homeowners have lost their homes through foreclosures or related bank actions since the crisis began, and the foreclosure rate is running at 170,000 per month, near the peak for the crisis. The African-American community, targeted as a large potential market for subprime mortgages during the bubble years, is suffering disproportionately from foreclosures. Clearly, in this case, the administration's efforts have accomplished next to nothing. Economist Dean Baker has proposed the most effective plan to keep people in their homes, which is to allow them to stay in their homes as renters, paying market rental rates. The government also needs to continue extending unemployment benefits and increase support for food stamps to compensate unemployed workers and the poor for their income losses.

In the same vein are work-sharing programs that extend unemployment compensation to workers who accept reduced hours that then enable their companies to avoid outright layoffs. Indeed, work-sharing can be even more effective and fairer than traditional unemployment insurance, since it spreads the reductions in work hours across a wide group of workers rather than concentrating the effects of the recession on the minority of workers who become completely jobless. Work-sharing programs have long been a major part of the social safety net in Western Europe. Over this recession, Germany has been especially aggressive in extending these benefits to prevent rising unemployment.

Such programs already exist on a modest scale in seventeen states. Senator Jack Reed of Rhode Island has introduced a bill that would extend these programs and provide start-up funds to create measures in the remaining states. While this would be a very favorable development, we also need to recognize that work-sharing programs, similar to anti-foreclosure measures, unemployment insurance and food stamps, do not inject any new major source of spending into the economy. They will help firm up the economy's floor. But even here they will need additional support, especially given the budgetary crisis faced by state and local governments around the country.

Bringing State and Local Governments Back to Health

California's budget is in a deep ditch, with an eye-popping 56 percent gap between expected revenues and spending commitments. Most other states are also staring at huge revenue shortfalls. The jobs recovery will not succeed until this situation is stabilized. How could it be otherwise? State and local governments account for about $2 trillion in annual spending, or 14 percent of GDP. Either directly or indirectly through their supply purchases, they generate 30 million jobs, 20 percent of the entire American workforce.

They are also the institutions most responsible for delivering basic needs to people—education, healthcare, support for the needy, public safety and infrastructure.

Unlike the federal government, nearly all state and local governments are required to balance their operating budgets every year. In a recession, tax revenues decline in step with the decline in people's incomes, spending levels and property values. This means that state and local governments almost inevitably fall into crisis in a recession. There are only two ways to avoid this within our current fiscal arrangements. The first is to build up a major surplus of "rainy-day funds." But keeping large amounts of cash on reserve is very difficult to do even during healthy economic times, given that the demands for health, education and public safety programs are persistent. The other way for states to avoid cutbacks during a recession is to receive financial injections from the federal government.

> Increasing support for state and local governments is not merely a stopgap measure but a key element of a long-term job-creation agenda.

The February 2009 recovery program provided $144 billion in support to offset that year's state budget shortfalls. This money was well spent. I know this firsthand through my own employer, the University of Massachusetts. We received around $50 million last year, which enabled us to prevent hundreds of layoffs. The layoffs would have sent shock waves throughout the region, since UMass is the largest employer in western Massachusetts. One can tell comparable stories in scores of communities around the country. Another roughly $200 billion is needed now. The Obama administration is supporting measures that would amount to perhaps $30–$50 billion.

Increasing support for state and local government activities should not be seen as merely a short-term stopgap but also as a major element of a longer-term job-creation agenda. The main activities supported by state and local governments are all effective sources of job creation, in comparison for example with military spending. Thus, infrastructure projects create 40 percent more jobs per dollar than spending on the military, healthcare creates 70 percent more jobs and education creates 240 percent more jobs. So if the government just moved its 2008 budget of $188 billion for Afghanistan and Iraq into support for education and infrastructure programs at the state and local levels, this alone would produce a net increase of about 2.3 million jobs per year.

Scaling Up the Green Recovery

One of the Obama administration's main jobs initiatives is retrofitting buildings, especially private homes, to make them more energy efficient. The president has described home retrofitting projects as a "sexy" way to save money. In fact, even relatively small investments in home retrofits, in the range of $2,500, can pay for themselves in three to four years, since they can lead to monthly energy bills falling by

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between 25 and 30 percent. These measures also produce rapid environmental benefits, since raising energy efficiency is the easiest way to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

Despite these attractions, private investments in retrofits have not expanded quickly enough to serve as a major jobs engine. The private market for retrofits remains underdeveloped. This is because homeowners are understandably wary about making investments when they are cash-strapped and their home values have collapsed. They are also not eager to face the hassles of dealing with banks, utility companies and work crews. This could all change rapidly if banks, utilities and community organizations could, in various combinations, figure out how to make retrofits easy and widely accessible for homeowners.

In the meantime, the government needs to take the lead by immediately advancing a major nationwide retrofitting initiative. The opportunity is enormous. There are roughly 24 billion square feet of building stock in hospitals and healthcare, education and government buildings. This is about 20 percent of all US building stock. Retrofitting these buildings would cost about $150 billion. If we assume this program is implemented over three years, at $50 billion per year, this would generate about 800,000 jobs per year over those three years. Retrofits are a highly efficient source of job creation, since all the work must be done within local communities, and a large proportion of the budgets go to hiring workers, as opposed to buying equipment, land and energy.

The most powerful force for creating the jobs we need will be the same financial institutions that caused the crisis in the first place.

This government-led project could be the launching point for a larger effort to build the institutional and market support for retrofitting remaining private-sector structures on an economy-wide scale. In addition to private hospitals and schools, the potential market for private retrofits for commercial and residential buildings is in the range of $650 billion. If even 20 percent of these buildings were retrofitted by the end of 2012, it would create another 800,000 jobs per year. Retrofitting alone could thus generate about 1.5 million of the 18 million jobs we need to create by the end of 2012. About 600,000 of them would be in construction, making up for one-quarter of the 2.6 million construction jobs lost since mid-2007.

Of course, the broader green investment project will need to expand well beyond retrofits to encompass public transportation, electrical grid upgrades and the creation of a competitive renewable-energy manufacturing sector. These will all be major sources of job creation over time. The same is true for investments in rebuilding our traditional infrastructure of bridges, roads and water management systems. But if we are serious about creating 18 million jobs within three years, retrofitting is the place to begin.

Making the Banks Respectable

The most powerful factor for creating 18 million jobs in three years will be the country's private financial institutions. Yes, I am referring to the same institutions—the banks, savings and loans, brokerage houses, insurance companies and hedge funds—whose reckless practices created the economic crisis in the first place.

That is the point. Financial institutions are a formidable force for both good and bad. They were effectively regulated for roughly thirty years after World War II, in the shadow of the 1930s financial collapse and Depression. This played a major role in generating the "Golden Age" of American capitalism through the mid-1970s, with rapid growth, low unemployment rates, diminishing inequality and historically unprecedented levels of financial stability. Without delving here into the details of today's debate on how to re-regulate finance—a debate, incredibly, still dominated by Wall Street—let's be clear on first principles. This is simple: we need regulations that will help channel credit toward productive, job-generating activities and away from hyper-speculation. For starters, that means pushing the lion's share of the banks' $850 billion in cash reserves into productive investments.

Of course, the banks need to maintain a reasonable supply of cash reserves as a cushion against future economic downturns. One of the main causes of the 2008–09 crisis and other recent financial crises was precisely that the banks' cash reserves were far too low.

In 2007 banks were holding only $21 billion in cash reserves. But increasing reserves from $21 billion to $850 billion in little more than a year is a new form of Wall Street excess. Let's say that banks should keep $200 billion in reserves as a cushion, a level roughly in line with the amounts they held during the era of regulation. The banks could still lend $650 billion to businesses just from the funds they are sitting on. At the very least, we could assume that overall new lending for productive, job-creating activities could be in the range of $700 billion or above, once we allow for funds coming from savings and loans, insurance companies and other financial institutions in addition to the commercial banks. We would then anticipate that the financial institutions would increase business lending by comparable amounts in 2011 and 2012. Doing so would help set a level of overall lending at roughly its average level during previous economic recoveries. At the same time, expanding credit and productive business investments by around $700 billion per year could by itself deliver nearly 18 million new jobs by the end of 2012.

A big problem is not only that banks are reluctant to lend but also that businesses are unwilling to borrow. Businesses have been heavily scarred by the recession and are not eager to take on new risks. Financial market policies therefore need to focus on helping to boost business confidence and reduce the risks of job-creating investments. The first step here would be for the Federal Reserve to substantially lower the interest rates at which private businesses may borrow. The Fed has been maintaining the interest rate at which private

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The Sphinx and the pyramid of King Khepren, Giza, Egypt

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banks borrow among themselves—the "federal funds rate"—at little more than zero for more than a year. But the rates at which nonfinancial businesses may borrow are at historic highs relative to the nearly zero federal funds rate.

An average solid business now has to pay about 6.5 percent interest for a long-term loan, roughly 6 percent more than the rate at which banks may borrow. The Fed needs to push the business borrowing rates down to 3 to 4 percent. The Fed has the power to make such a move, though to do so would certainly deviate from standard practice. But let's recall that nothing the Fed did during the 2008–09 crisis to bail out the banks followed the rule book. It is time for the Fed to pursue innovative policies that will directly benefit ordinary businesses and working people.

The government also needs to intervene to lower the risks facing banks making loans for productive investments and the businesses doing the investing. The policy tool to ramp up here is the government's loan guarantee programs, which support small businesses, green investments, students, rural development and affordable housing. In 2007, the last year before the recession, the government guaranteed about $250 billion in private-sector loans.

It is time for the Fed to pursue innovative policies that will directly benefit ordinary businesses and working people.

The government should roughly double the level of support—i.e., guaranteeing another $250 billion in loans per year—to dramatically expand low-risk opportunities for a wide range of job-generating investments. The proposals being advanced to create a specialized Green Bank as well as an Infrastructure Bank fit comfortably within this broader agenda of channeling the country's financial resources to high-priority projects. At the same time, if banks decide they still can't resist pouring huge sums into the Wall Street casino, they will have to forfeit their eligibility for loan guarantees. The banks should also be required to continue holding high levels of cash reserves as a cushion against their high-stakes gambling. Keep in mind that the government holds controlling stakes in AIG—what had been the world's largest and most sophisticated financial insurance company—as well as Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, still the most influential mortgage-lending institutions. AIG, Fannie and Freddie could easily convert part of their operations previously devoted to hyper-speculation to supporting guaranteed loans focused on job creation.

What happens when businesses default on these guaranteed loans? Won't this blow a hole in the government's fiscal deficit? Here is what recent experience tells us. In 2007 about 4 percent of the government's guaranteed loans went into default. If we assume that the default rate remained at roughly the 2007 level for this expanded program, that would add about $9 billion, or 0.3 percent, to the federal budget. Even if, implausibly, the default rate on the new loans doubled relative to the 2007 level, that would still increase the federal budget by only 0.6 percent. In short, roughly doubling the government's traditional loan-guarantee programs is eminently affordable as well as an effective means of reducing risks for private businesses, which in turn would encourage them to make the $700 billion in new job-creating investments we need.

How does the set of proposals outlined here realistically get us to 18 million new jobs by the end of 2012? Starting with the $850 billion cash hoard that commercial banks are holding in their Federal Reserve accounts, we move about $700 billion in new credit into domestic employment-focused investments. Assuming we have established a firm floor for the economy through the measures discussed above, injecting $700 billion in new spending into the economy will generate about 5.5 million jobs in 2010. That's because this $700 billion will generate a 5 percent rate of GDP growth, which in turn translates into about 4 percent employment growth. My calculation here assumes that the mix of total employment will shift toward green activities and education, where the jobs per dollar of spending are significantly higher than alternatives such as fossil fuel energy and military spending. We then build from the momentum of a strong 2010 recovery to maintain the roughly 4 percent rate of employment growth in 2011 and 2012, which will create about 6 million jobs in 2011 and 6.5 million in 2012. By the end of 2012, about 156 million people would be employed, 18 million more than the 138 million working today (see www.peri.umass.edu for details on these and related calculations).

The necessity of advancing a jobs program on this scale follows from the fact that the crisis before us is not just 9.7 percent unemployment, narrowly defined, or 16.5 percent unemployment, more reasonably defined, though these figures obviously speak volumes about the interlocking failures of our political and economic systems. Even under a fairly favorable economic scenario, we will be saddled with deep unemployment problems well beyond the 2012 presidential election and perhaps up to the 2016 election, unless we take dramatic action now. Given the severity of the 2008–09 financial crash and recession, it would also be foolish to assume that a healthy recovery is a sure bet. Making things worse is that the Obama administration and Democratic Congress—yes, the Democrats do still hold strong majorities in both Houses—appear unwilling to take actions consistent with the depth of the problems at hand.

Perhaps one can forgive them for underestimating what was needed with the February 2009 recovery program. The full extent of the financial crash and recession were not evident then. I too underestimated what was needed at the time, writing in these pages fifteen months ago ("How to End the Recession," November 24, 2008). The facts and choices before us are now much clearer. We can indeed create 18 million jobs and drive the unemployment rate to 4 percent by the end of 2012. But we have to begin now, we have to stop thinking small and we have to be willing to fight. ■

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Iraq's New Sectarian Storm Clouds

The purging of Sunni candidates from the March elections raises the specter of civil conflict.

by ROBERT DREYFUSS

Seven years after the US invasion of Iraq toppled Saddam Hussein's government and pulverized the Iraqi state, voters will go to the polls on March 7 in an election that most Iraqis hope will continue their country's uneven progress toward political stability. But a new crisis, provoked by an anti-Baathist purge in mid-January by Tehran's allies in Iraq, has threatened to unravel Iraq's fledgling democracy. At best, a backroom deal at the last minute could restore some semblance of normalcy to the election, but the purge has poisoned the atmosphere, perhaps fatally. At worst, the crisis could reignite the sectarian conflict that brought Iraq to the brink of all-out civil war in 2006.

"Do I think there could be a return to civil war?" asks Feisal al-Istrabadi, Iraq's former UN ambassador. "I do."

The possibility of new violence in Iraq, coming on the eve of the withdrawal of tens of thousands of US troops by August, has alarmed the Obama administration. At the White House, at the US military's Central Command and at the American Embassy in Baghdad, officials are worried. "Tony Blinken was off the charts," says Brian Katulis, a senior fellow and Iraq specialist at the Center for American Progress (CAP), referring to the top aide to Vice President Joseph Biden, who has taken charge of American policy in Iraq since last summer. Another insider, who recently visited Baghdad for talks with US military and diplomatic officials and who requested anonymity, says Gen. Ray Odierno and the military command think President Obama may have to reconsider the US withdrawal timetable. "People in the administration that I talk to say Iraq is way too important for the United States to allow it to implode," he says.

Just a year ago, it seemed as if Iraq was muddling through. The January 2009 provincial elections, widely seen as a dry run for this year's more important vote to choose a new national government, boosted the fortunes of secular and nationalist parties and delivered what many analysts saw as a near knockout blow to the turbaned religious parties, especially the Iranian-backed Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), which lost big. Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, disguising his origins as a leader of the secretive Shiite Dawa Party, won strong support last year while campaigning as a born-again nationalist atop a new coalition that he called State of Law. After the provincial elections, Maliki even began to explore the possibility of an alliance with representatives of the mostly Sunni secular opposition, including Saleh al-Mutlaq, who leads the National Dialogue Front, and with nonsectarian politicians such as former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi.

That was then. Starting last spring, at the urging of top officials in Iran—including Ali Larijani, the conservative, Iraqi-born speaker of the Iranian Parliament, and Brig. Gen. Qassem Suleimani, commander of the Quds Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps—a group of sectarian Shiite religious leaders patched over their differences to establish the Iraqi National Alliance (INA), linking ISCI with the forces of rogue cleric Muqtada al-Sadr; former Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari of a renegade Dawa faction; and Ahmad Chalabi, the former darling of US neoconservatives, who has long maintained close ties to Iran's hardliners.

ALAA AL-MARJANI/AP

An Iraqi man walks past a poster showing one of the barred Sunni candidates, Dhafir al-Ani.

The creation of the INA was widely seen, inside and outside Iraq, as an Iranian project. Reidar Visser, a close observer of Iraqi affairs at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, says efforts to rebuild the Shiite sectarian alliance began last spring, after a visit to Baghdad by Larijani. Soon afterward, a stream of Iraqi officials made pilgrimages to Tehran, where a deal between the Hakim family (the founders of ISCI) and Sadr was brokered by Iran. "Part of the Iranian strategy has been to put politics in Iraq back on the sectarian track," says Visser. Both Iran and the new Shiite alliance pressured Maliki to join, but at that time the prime minister felt strong enough to run independently.

Then, this past January 14, Iraq's electoral overseers ratified a decision by the so-called Accountability and Justice Commission, an unelected body controlled by Chalabi and one of his cronies, Ali al-Lami, to ban more than 500 candidates for Parliament. They were barred from running, said the commission, on vague charges of ties to the deposed Baath Party. Among those banned were current members of Parliament and Iraqi officials, including Defense Minister Abdul-Kader Jassem al-Obeidi and Mutlaq, who'd joined forces with Allawi. The commission's action was a

Robert Dreyfuss is a Nation *contributing editor.*

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bomb thrown into the center of Iraqi politics and sparked talk of a boycott and even a new antigovernment insurgency.

Lami, the architect of the purge, has a shady past. In August 2008 he was arrested by US forces in Iraq and held for more than a year because of his involvement with a violent Shiite underground movement called the League of the Righteous. The League, which is believed to enjoy covert backing from Iran's Quds Force, has been responsible for a series of high-profile killings and kidnappings. Recently several of the League's other leaders, including founder Qais al-Khazali and his brother Laith, were also released from custody, and at least one of them fled to Iran. Although the Khazali brothers flirted with abandoning violence and becoming a political party, on January 23 the Khazalis' League took responsibility for the kidnapping of an American contractor.

"The country will go into severe turmoil, I'm sure," said Allawi, after the banning was confirmed by Iraq's electoral commission. "This will put Iraq in the box of sectarianism and the route to civil war."

That Iraq is once again on the brink of civil conflict is the legacy of unresolved differences that linger in the uneasy calm that has prevailed since late 2007. Among those conflicts are the simmering dispute over the borders of the semiautonomous Kurdish region in Iraq's north; the status of Kirkuk and its oil industry, which is claimed by both the Kurds and the central government; and constitutional and legal disputes about federal versus provincial powers, including how to divvy up Iraq's oil export revenue. But perhaps the bitterest dispute of all is a tangle of issues that involve the disenfranchised Sunni Arab minority, tensions between Sunni and Shiite leaders, and the problem of how to reintegrate those who were part of Iraq's Baathist past. It's the last issue that was stirred up by the Chalabi-inspired ban.

The momentum of last year's provincial elections raised the hopes of all Iraqis who looked forward to a future in which Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds would run as Iraqis, divided not along ethnic and sectarian lines but according to political differences. To capitalize on that sentiment, a number of new parties and politicians have put down roots in advance of the 2010 election. Among them are the Iraq Unity party, formed by Jawad al-Bolani, the secular Shiite minister of the interior, and Ahmad Abu Risha, whose slain brother founded the Sunni-led Awakening movement, which brought thousands of former insurgents into politics; the Ahrar (Liberal) party, founded by Iyad Jamal Aldin, a Shiite cleric who is a fierce advocate for secularism and who is strongly opposed to Iran's influence in Iraq; and the National Unity Front, led by Aiham al-Samaraie, the former minister of electricity. All of these parties were intimidated or otherwise adversely affected by the anti-Baathist witch hunt launched by the commission. "I can't have my future depend on something that appears in the brain of Ahmad Chalabi," says al-Samaraie. "They are trying to clean up anyone they don't want to see in the next Parliament."

But the party hit hardest by the ban was the Iraqi Nationalist Movement, a big coalition led by Allawi, Mutlaq, Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi and a group of Sunni and Shiite secularists who hoped to capitalize on voter disenchantment with the sectarianism and religious fundamentalism of ISCI, Dawa and the Sadrists. According to Istrabadi, former ambassador to the UN, private polls taken by the American and British embassies indicate that the Allawi-Mutlaq bloc might do well enough at the polls to make Allawi prime minister. "That alliance has a credible path to power," says Ali Allawi, a former Iraqi defense minister and a cousin of Iyad Allawi. "It's well funded, and it's based on a bedrock of Sunni support."

The most credible hypothesis is that officials in Tehran and leaders of the Shiite alliance in Iraq panicked over the possibility that the Allawi-Mutlaq party might actually win. "I think Ahmad [Chalabi] and the boys started to run scared," Istrabadi says.

Prime Minister Maliki, who might have played the statesman and urged a compromise, shocked Iraq's political establishment by siding aggressively with the Iran-backed coalition. When the ban was announced, US officials moved quickly to use their influence to reverse it. Gen. David Petraeus, the Centcom commander, warned bluntly that Chalabi and Lami had "hijack[ed] the [commission] without having been confirmed as the leadership of it and being manipulated by, reportedly, the Iranian Quds force." Vice President Biden flew hurriedly to Baghdad to urge a reversal of the ban, and after his visit an Iraqi appeals court seemed to take his advice, overruling the Chalabi-Lami commission and Iraq's election board. After the appeals court ruling, US officials congratulated themselves. "We were heartened by the decision earlier this week to reverse the deletion of the 500 names from the election lists for the upcoming election," said Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on February 5.

The most credible hypothesis is that officials in Tehran and Iraq's Shiite leaders feared that a secular nationalist alliance might win in March.

But not so fast. Following the court's decision, Maliki demanded that the appeals court decision be overruled. Ali al-Dabbagh, one of Maliki's closest aides, called the lifting of the ban "illegal and not constitutional." Another of Maliki's aides called for the expulsion of US ambassador Christopher Hill, who reportedly lobbied behind the scenes to get the ban lifted. And, in an unusual breach of diplomatic protocol, Maliki himself blasted Hill. "We will not allow American ambassador Christopher Hill to go beyond his diplomatic mission," said Maliki. He began working with leaders of his coalition, members of Parliament and the top court to ensure that the Chalabi-imposed ban remain.

The Chalabi bombshell, despite the shock it engendered, wasn't a complete surprise. Since last summer, Maliki and the Shiite alliance, the INA, have been working hard to scare Iraqis about the alleged danger of a comeback by Saddamists. Few, if any, of the opposition candidates are Saddam loyalists, and most of them who did once belong to the Baath Party, including

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Allawi and Mutlaq, quit or were expelled decades ago. But Maliki and the INA are trying to stampede Shiite voters, who make up more than half the Iraqi electorate, into staying away from the nonsectarian parties, even the ones led by Shiites such as Allawi, Interior Minister Bolani and Jamal Aldin.

"One of the things that Chalabi and the de-Baathification committee are trying to do is to equate secularists and nationalists with Baathists," suggests Istrabadi. "Has he succeeded? We don't know yet."

At stake is the vote of what might be called the Shiite "silent majority." Nearly all Kurds will vote for the Kurdish alliance in Iraq's north, giving the Kurdish parties about 20 percent of the seats in the 325-member Parliament. And the vast majority of Sunni voters are guaranteed to vote for one of the Sunni-led parties or for secularists like Allawi. So Maliki and the INA are competing for the Shiite vote. And Iraq analysts say there is probably a big chunk of Shiite voters—especially among the middle class, the educated elite, shopkeepers and capital-intensive farmers in the south—who aren't happy with the religious parties and who blame Maliki for his failure to improve the economy or deliver services. Like the McCarthyite Republicans of the 1950s, who tried to tar liberals and leftists with charges of sympathy for communism, Maliki has apparently decided that scaring his base with the fear of a Baathist comeback is his best option.

Until this past August, Maliki had hoped to base his reelection campaign on a carefully cultivated strongman image, trumpeting the idea that his US-trained security forces had defeated militias and terrorists. "His political strategy was to go for the Schwarzenegger image," says Charles Ries of the RAND Corporation, an ex-ambassador who served in the US Embassy in Baghdad. But a series of devastating car- and truck-bomb attacks that leveled huge portions of downtown Baghdad in August, October and January, destroying the foreign ministry, the finance ministry and other government landmarks, demolished Maliki's credibility as a security candidate.

Maliki's problem now is that even if he manages to do well in the election—in part by taking advantage of his ability to use state funds, the media and even the Iraqi armed forces on his behalf—neither he nor the INA will be able to claim legitimacy if the vote is marred by bans, purges and a Sunni boycott. Like President Ahmadinejad in Iran and President Karzai in Afghanistan, both suffering after fraud-stained elections, a Maliki-INA-Kurdish alliance ruling Iraq again would be unstable at best. "I don't have any doubt that if Maliki is willing to kiss and make up with the [INA] and do a devil's deal with the Kurds, then he can form a government," says David Mack, a retired US Foreign Service officer who served twice in Iraq. "But it will be an unstable one, because it doesn't do anything to heal the rift between the Shia religious parties and the Sunni and Shia secular groups."

And if another lethal insurgency erupts, pitting Sunnis, dissidents, Baathists and even a revived Al Qaeda in Iraq against the government, countrywide violence could draw Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and others into the fight. After all, Iran is not the only country backing allies in Iraqi politics; Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the Gulf states are, on a smaller scale, backing Allawi and various Sunni candidates, an Iraqi source reports. "The Saudis don't operate directly," he says. "They operate through a route of deniability, using Lebanese businessmen, environmental charities, an assortment of princes and so on."

At its core, the crisis in Iraq is also a struggle between Iran and the United States for influence in Iraq and across the oil-rich Persian Gulf. As the United States withdraws its forces, and as Iran builds up political, military and economic influence, Iraq will likely be pulled into Iran's orbit. "It's almost like watching gravity work," says CAP's Brian Katulis. Barring the outbreak of civil war, the most likely outcome of a rigged election in Iraq would look very much like the coalition that governs Iraq today, but it would be even more closely aligned with Tehran. "I think we'll see an increasingly authoritarian regime with close ties to Iran," says Visser.

At its core, the crisis is also a struggle between Iran and the United States for influence in Iraq and across the oil-rich Persian Gulf.

As the deadline for pulling US forces out of Iraq gets closer, American influence is likely to wane. The fact that Biden, Petraeus, Odierno and Hill couldn't persuade Maliki to reverse the Chalabi-imposed ban is a sign that the United States is no longer calling the shots in Baghdad. In fact, there is rising awareness in Washington about the inevitability of Iran's growing power in Iraq, coupled with the realization that there is little or nothing the United States can do to reverse it.

Many of the Iraqi politicians opposed to the Shiite-Iranian alliance in Iraq want the United States to halt its withdrawal and throw its weight behind them, if only to checkmate Iranian influence. So far, at least, there is little sign of that. During Allawi's last visit to Washington, well-connected friends tried to get him an appointment at the White House with Denis McDonough, one of Obama's top advisers at the National Security Council, but the White House rebuffed Allawi. "I told them, 'You're dissing the man who could be Iraq's next prime minister,'" says Kenneth Pollack, director of the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution.

Obama, most recently in his State of the Union address, pledged once again that US forces in Iraq, now at 98,000, would fall to 50,000 by August, and that all American troops would leave Iraq. Among other things, the Pentagon needs those troops for its growing presence in Afghanistan. That provides an even greater incentive for a US-Iranian accord that would extend beyond the dispute over Tehran's nuclear program to include Iraq, Afghanistan and terrorism. But the Iranians, who are expert chess players, know that their ability to make things in Iraq better—or worse—for the United States gives them important leverage over Washington. Having few moves to make, Obama has no choice but to follow through on the US commitment to get out of Iraq. ■

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Texas Hold 'em, Tea Party Style

Debra Medina has come from nowhere to threaten a runoff in the GOP gubernatorial primary.

by BOB MOSER

Texans, as everybody knows, relish nothing more than a big, bloody showdown. And the 2010 Republican primary for governor has long had Lone Star denizens licking their chops. Two-term Governor Rick Perry, the ruggedly handsome successor to George W. Bush, would be squaring off on March 2 against the state's most popular politician, Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison. The two are longtime rivals for supremacy within the Texas GOP, standard-bearers of the party's two competing wings: right and righter.

The stakes looked larger than control of the Texas GOP. With the national Republican Party reeling from the shellacking it took in 2008, Hutchison vs. Perry shaped up as a symbolic battle for the soul—and future—of the party. Hutchison, a former Houston newscaster and state treasurer, embodies the politer, Chamber of Commerce style of conservatism. Nominally prochoice, she's long talked about building a more "inclusive" party—one that could continue to dominate in a minority-white state. Perry, a Christian conservative ideologue, lucked into the gubernatorial job by serving as lieutenant governor when the US Supreme Court appointed his mentor to the presidency—and he's since shown no interest in giving it up, though he is the longest-serving governor in state history. If he prevailed over Hutchison, who in early 2009 led him by as much as twenty-five points in early polling among likely GOP voters, it would be a victory for the more rock-ribbed "whiter and brighter" wing of the party.

It was gonna be a humdinger. But, as tends to happen in Texas, several funny things have occurred to shift the race in unexpected directions. First, Perry catapulted over Hutchison in the polls after making himself an MSNBC laughingstock—and talk-radio hero—by going all George Wallace at last year's Tax Day tea party rallies, bellowing "states' rights, states' rights, states' rights!" and flirting with the notion that Texas might respond to President Obama's "socialism" by seceding from the Union. Meanwhile, Hutchison fumbled her way through 2009. The lowlight: she announced that she would resign from the Senate in October or November to run full time for governor—and then, with her poll numbers sagging, she informed Texans last fall that she would stay in the Senate after all and campaign part time for governor, because she had discovered a solemn duty to stay put and defeat health-care reform and cap-and-trade legislation. The message: I want to be your governor, kind of.

The funniest twist of all? The long-anticipated two-person race has—almost overnight—turned into a three-person free-for-all, with a first-time candidate, a Ron Paul apostle named

BRANDON THIBODEAUX

Debra Medina speaks to supporters at a February 6 rally in Cleburne.

Debra Medina, riding a grassroots tea party movement from obscurity into contention. Medina, whose two campaign planks are "state sovereignty" and abolishing property taxes (in a state that already has no income tax), has managed the considerable feat of staking out a place to the right of Perry. From 4 percent in November's polls, Medina had surged by early February to within striking distance of Hutchison and a spot in a likely runoff with Perry. Perry's cry for "states' rights" has proven no match, on the vast far right of the Texas GOP, for Medina's call, at a now infamous "Sovereignty or Secession" rally, for the "tree of freedom" to once again be "watered with the blood of tyrants and patriots."

So Texas Republicans' choice on March 2 is now between right, righter and rightest. Thanks to Medina's growing support, a runoff in mid-April is almost guaranteed, since you can't win the nomination without more than 50 percent of the vote. Awaiting the tattered victor in November will be the strongest Democratic candidate the state has seen since the late, lamented Governor Ann Richards: Bill White, a former under secretary of energy in the Clinton administration and popular mayor of Houston. White, who'd originally been campaigning to replace Hutchison for her Senate seat, announced his switch to the governor's race just after Thanksgiving. Since then, he has out-fundraised both Hutchison and Perry as he cruises to a near-certain landslide victory in the Democratic primary over Farouk Shami, a Palestinian immigrant and hair-care mogul. And then Medina tripped over her momentum the second week of February, telling Glenn Beck that she wasn't convinced the

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9/11 conspiracy theory of involvement by the US government had been disproven. The novice candidate quickly began damage control, saying that of course Muslim terrorists had attacked the World Trade Center. But to many, her comments to Beck and the right-wing guru's quick dismissal of her were sure signs that Medina was nuts—and that her ability to build beyond the hard-core right of the base might be limited.

Confused? Welcome, then, to the head-spinning world of Texas politics, circa 2010. Molly Ivins once famously called the state the "national laboratory for bad government." Just as aptly, you could call it America's home of political lunacy. And it's never been more loony than it is right now, especially on the Republican side.

Shortly after 3 PM on Super Bowl Sunday, far out in the right-wing suburbs of Houston, Rick Perry and Sarah Palin—fresh from her palm-reading appearance at the National Tea Party Convention—took the stage to wild stomps and cheers from a nearly all-white crowd of thousands in a multi–high school arena. Palin, lavishly decked out in a black velvet coat and red suede boots, was on hand to shore up Perry's flagging support among tea party types, whom he'd been losing to the upstart Medina, and to amplify the central themes of his campaign: Washington is the worst, and Texas is the greatest!

Perry, warming up the crowd for Palin, cut right to the chase: "Do you want a leader who loves Texas and all it stands for?" he asked. "Or do you want a creature of Washington who tears down Texas at every turn?"

From the beginning of his campaign against Hutchison, Washington-bashing has been Perry's main script. His campaign has been dedicated to painting Hutchison as a "creature of Washington," while he shines as the stimulus-rejecting, Texas-first rebel preventing her from bringing big-spending socialism to Austin.

"Fact is," Perry hollered, "Texas is better off than might near any state I can think of." Campaign videos that had been playing on large screens behind the stage had been making that very case, touting the state's high ranking as a "business friendly" destination (no great surprise, given its low taxes and nearly union-free labor force). While unemployment has risen sharply in Texas over the past two years, it's still lower than the national average—another statistic Perry trumpets at every opportunity. And the state managed to balance its budget in 2009—another thing Perry boasts about, even though the federal stimulus money that he fiercely protested was the only thing that kept Texas in the black.

By all other measures, Perry's tenure as governor has been disastrous for the state. The high school dropout rate has climbed to nearly 30 percent. More than one-quarter of Texans have no health insurance. Thanks to a flurry of deregulation Perry pushed through the legislature, Lone Star Staters pay some of the highest utility and homeowners' insurance rates in the country. Compared with Perry, George W. Bush was a raving liberal as governor.

None of which mattered a whit to the suburbanites who'd come out to see Sarah and cheer Perry's tea party–lite message. Introducing Palin, Perry stuck to his theme: "I doubt there is a political figure in our country who gives liberals a bigger case of hives," he said. The folks were delighted by this. "If Keith Olbermann were here today, I bet his head would explode," Perry said, chuckling merrily. "I'm sorry—that image just really tickles me."

Palin—reading from a written script—faithfully echoed Perry's "Washington bad/Texas good" theme, saying that his re-election would "send Washington a message about how things can be done right." The choice is between "the Texas way or the Washington way," she said. "When Washington came calling, he told 'em thanks but no thanks," Palin said, referring to the stimulus funds, which of course came anyway.

This was the message that had lifted Perry above Hutchison throughout 2009. But while Perry still wows 'em in the well-off burbs, he is hardly the ideal candidate for down-and-dirty tea partyers, who see him—with plenty of justification—as a "corporate-handout, say-one-thing-and-mean-another candidate," in the words of Phillip Martin, a blogger for the popular liberal Burnt Orange Report.

"Perry has been able to tap into the anti-government movement that has existed in Texas for a long time," Martin says. "But that support is a mile wide and an inch deep."

While Perry's populism is calculated and Hutchison's is nonexistent, Medina speaks straight to the guts of disaffected Republicans.

Hard-core right-wingers long ago caught on to the fact that Perry's campaigns have been heavily financed by big corporate interests, most notably the state's powerful home-building lobby. And the excesses of his Texas Enterprise Fund, a $363 million "job creation" fund that has doled out huge chunks of money to Perry campaign contributors like Countrywide Financial, the disgraced subprime-mortgage megalith, have been widely reported. The governor suffered another embarrassment in January, when the *Dallas Morning News* reported on a campaign program in which Texans were being paid to set up "Perry Home Headquarters" and round up folks who'd commit to voting for him. One of the most profitable operations, netting $13,440, was being run by an El Paso woman with a rap sheet including a felony drug conviction and a misdemeanor assault.

Hutchison, who has never offered a convincing rationale for her campaign, has been unable to capitalize on Perry's foibles. Her occasional breaks with the right—supporting *Roe v. Wade*, voting to expand the Children's Health Insurance Program, backing some forms of embryonic stem cell research—have made the senator look downright "pink" to many in the Republican base.

Hutchison is most popular with moderates—not with the folks who'll turn out for a Republican primary. After spending much of 2009 losing ground to Perry with her halfhearted campaign, she had a chance to regain her footing when the

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candidates met for two televised debates in January. But the senator was tripped up, on both occasions, by the same direct question: would she support overturning *Roe v. Wade*?

In the first debate, January 14, Hutchison's repeated refusal to answer yes or no prompted gales of derisive laughter from the audience. In the second debate, conducted January 29 without an audience, she was shown a video of her comedic turn—and again refused to answer the question. She had fallen straight into Perry's trap, sounding like a compromised Washingtonian.

"Hutchison has tried to be a big-tent Republican, at least in Texas terms," says Harvey Kronberg, a longtime state-government observer who publishes the online Quorum Report. "Talk-radio doesn't want her, tea parties don't want her. The base of the party doesn't want to be a big tent."

All of which should have Perry sitting pretty. Except that, out of nowhere, a far purer champion of the tea party right has arisen.

The day before the Perry-Palin spectacle, in the working-class North Texas town of Cleburne, a few hundred folks assembled in the front lot of the Forrest Chevrolet dealership, situated along a butt-ugly stretch of industrial highway, waiting for hours in a cold, whipping wind, waving yellow "Don't Tread on Me" flags and cheering any mention of their newly minted hero.

Few Texans had ever heard of Debra Medina before the January 14 GOP debate. No surprise there: her only elected office has been chair of the Wharton County Republican Party. But, given the opportunity to face off with Perry and Hutchison, Medina immediately established herself as the real deal for right-wing Texans. While the senator equivocated and the governor mugged for the cameras and came across as ill informed and ill prepared, Medina—a sturdy-framed, plain-faced home schooler who runs a small medical-billing business in South Texas—dished up red meat for the Republican right in a straight-shooting and surprisingly confident manner that made her a folk hero overnight.

A debate panelist, noting that Medina was known for carrying a handgun in her car, asked her if she also carried it into the grocery store when she went shopping. "I'd like to, but I don't," Medina responded. When Perry nervously evaded a question about what federal programs he'd like to nullify, Medina said matter-of-factly that she would start with health-care reform if it passed. Throughout the debate, she offered a simple but consistent message, oft-repeated: "restoring true private property rights and gun ownership."

Medina immediately shot into double digits in the polls. It didn't hurt a bit when she subsequently characterized Perry as a "jumpy, fidgety frat boy" or when, before the second debate, she issued a press release calling the governor's claims of fiscal responsibility "bullshit." When she gave another poised, pointed performance in the second (and final) debate, Medina began to edge toward Hutchison in the polls.

The third-wheel campaign has clearly benefited from Perry's and Hutchison's expensive crossfire of attack ads. "She's telling all of Texas how bad *he* is, and he's telling all of Texas how bad *she* is," Medina says. "And I'm going, Yeah, they're right. They're both bad."

Medina's platform is as thin as her political experience. But in the tea party universe, there's nothing so appealing as someone who's never held office—and never had to grapple with, or vote on, complicated issues that don't align perfectly with a straight-up ideology. Medina's answer to almost every problem is automatic: leave it to the free market. At a Dallas forum on the first Saturday in February, before she made the journey to Cleburne, Medina was asked what she'd do to improve the state's wretched public schools. Easy: "We have to have the courage, I think, to tear down the sacred walls that we've erected around the public school monopoly and force competition into that."

And what about her proposal to replace property taxes with sales taxes, another audience member asked. Wouldn't that hurt lower-income folks? "Well, everything is regressive," Medina answered. Food and medicine, she suggested, might be exempted to avoid "creating a taxing structure that is oppressive."

All of which, in the twisted world of tea party Texans, makes her a populist. And while Perry's populism is transparently calculated, and Hutchison's is nonexistent, Medina speaks straight to the guts of disaffected Republicans.

At the Chevrolet lot in Cleburne, she showed how it's done. If "we get government off the backs of Texans," Medina said, "we're not gonna have an economic crisis. We're not gonna have an energy crisis. We're not gonna have an immigration crisis."

"Do not allow the seeds of fear and doubt to take root in your life," Medina told the cheering guns-and-camo crowd. "This is a time unlike any other time in our history, where we're gonna stand up and accomplish a revolution without shedding a drop of blood." Unless, of course, bloodshed becomes necessary.

Medina also has an independent streak that alternately perplexes and delights her fans. She supports a moratorium on death sentences in Texas. She talks at length about her disgust with the border wall running through South Texas, which "does nothing but consume private property and waste resources." She speaks passionately about bringing her husband's fellow Hispanics into the Republican fold, saying that Perry's failure to do so "almost makes me cry."

The occasional deviations from Republican orthodoxy don't appear to bother Medina's fans. Her lack of poll-tested positions is what draws them to her. "It's that sense of honesty," says Antoinette Walker of Dallas. "Don't tell us everything is roses," Walker says. "If somebody says it's all nice, and this is the best state—it's a lie. It's a lie."

While Perry will likely withstand Medina's challenge, her candidacy is shifting the Texas GOP even further right. But the state as a whole is moving in the opposite direction, thanks largely to demographic shifts. While John McCain carried Texas in 2008, the State House of Representatives—which had gone whole-hog Republican earlier in the decade—was nearly recaptured by Democrats, who now dominate the state's fast-growing, rapidly diversifying urban areas. In 2010 the Republicans will probably hold on to Texas. But the internecine war among the tea party crowd is a grim omen for the party's long-term future. If Rick Perry isn't right enough for Texas Republicans, they're headed straight off an ideological cliff. ■

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Books & the Arts.

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Taylor Branch and Bill Clinton in the Oval Office, October 20, 1993

The Cut Man

by CHRIS LEHMANN

America's unfortunate habit of electing horrible Republican chief executives to consecutive terms in office has created an odd distorting effect that redounds to the great benefit of their predecessors. It's all too easy to succumb to the fantasy that the Carter years weren't all that bad, comparatively speaking—the well-meaning Georgian scold didn't gleefully sack the public treasury the way that Ronald Reagan did, nor did he preside over epic scandals such as Iran/Contra or the savings and loan debacle. Yes, during the Carter era the country suffered rampant inflation, skyrocketing energy costs, interest rates north of 20 percent and foreign policy paralysis, but hey, at least the guy wasn't Reagan.

Likewise, the venality, abuses of power and rank incompetence of the George W. Bush era have spurred an entirely pardonable Clinton nostalgia in progressive circles. Even the pundits who, in real time, stood among the lustiest and pettiest pursuers of our forty-second president, such as *Time* magazine's Joe Klein, duly revised their jaundiced view of William Jefferson Clinton and his excesses with the briskness of a well-oiled weather vane. In 2003, seven years after Klein cashed in with the dishonestly packaged pseudonymous novel *Primary Colors*, he produced a market-correcting study of Clinton's "misunderstood presidency" called, naturally, *The Natural*. Sure, Clinton might be a self-involved boomer narcissist who was instrumental in jolting the Republican Revolution into gear, the conventional wisdom now had it, but hey, at least the guy wasn't Bush.

The glib interchangeability of these sentiments bespeaks their superficiality. Pundit-posturing retains its improbably long half-life largely because of the short memories of its intended audience—and the ability of the practitioners of the art never to hold any provisional view of anything too firmly, or for very long. One would hope that Taylor Branch's sprawling book *The Clinton Tapes* could restore some much-needed balance to the rearview vision of the Clinton years. Here, after all, are the unfiltered reflections of Clinton himself, delivered in seventy-nine taped sessions during his tumultuous administration. What's more, Branch, author of a splendid three-volume study of the civil rights revolution—the second installment of which, *Pillar of Fire*, was published in 1998, near the end of his sojourns to the White House—seems ideally positioned to guard the inter-

The Clinton Tapes
Wrestling History With the President.
By Taylor Branch.
Simon & Schuster. 707 pp. $35.

Chris Lehmann is an editor at Bookforum, *associate editor of* The Baffler *and a columnist for TheAwl.com.*

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ests of public memory against a president's prodigious appetite for vindication before the bar of history.

True, Branch is an old confrere of Clinton's. The two men, together with Clinton's then-girlfriend Hillary Rodham, shared an apartment in Austin, Texas, in 1972, when they were all doing advance work in the state for the McGovern campaign. But they had fallen out of touch until Clinton's election in 1992, and Branch smartly rebuffed Clinton's initial overture, shortly after his inauguration, to serve as "an Arthur Schlesinger"—an uncritical court historian—for his fledgling presidency. When Clinton groused about the press's fixation on "bogus scandals," such as an alleged grounding of flights at LAX while the president got an expensive haircut on board Air Force One, Branch delicately noted that such grievances were not really the stuff of posterity. "I said he would do well to distinguish between short-term and long-term problems," Branch recalls. "He should concentrate on making the best history he could. No president can script the future by controlling its writers or themes, but every president can govern with an eye on tomorrow. That means navigating politics, including relations with the press, and it recommends gathering detailed records vibrant enough to help posterity establish truth over myth."

That exchange eventually served as the brief for the oral history sessions collected in *The Clinton Tapes*—and just as clearly informs its lofty subtitle, "Wrestling History With the President." But it becomes clear over the many long pages of Branch's chronicle that the author isn't really wrestling alongside the chief executive to coax a myth-resistant account of Clinton and his record from the maw of history (and thus inevitably tussling at times with Clinton himself). Rather—to stretch sports metaphors a bit—he is serving as a cut man in the president's corner, salving bruises and dispensing smelling salts before sending him back into the fray.

Branch's odd deference to his fighter's ring stratagems extends to the very format the book takes. Since the sessions were conceived as a notation system to aid Clinton in the composition of his memoir *My Life*, published in 2004, *The Clinton Tapes* is not a verbatim transcription of the Clinton-Branch sessions but rather an account of Branch's executive summaries of the gatherings, which he usually dictated on the drive back from Washington to his home in Baltimore. (Public access to the tapes proper, meanwhile, has been complicated by Bush-era extensions of executive secrecy provisions, leaving chroniclers of the Clinton White House to rely inordinately on the necessarily partial and filtered inside accounts of Branch and Clinton.) While Branch is able to produce enormously detailed reconstructions of the content and settings of these confabs, the finished product here inevitably lacks the fuller, finer-grained vantage that a more lifelike Clinton, with distinctive patterns of speech and thought, would bring to the book. The effect, instead, is more like overhearing a muffled conversation through a flimsy wall—readers can closely follow the substance of the exchanges but cannot absorb their texture or appreciate their qualities of real-time give-and-take.

Branch lacks Boswell's eye for his biographical subject's many foibles and imperfections.

Being a cut man is a fine role for an intellectual ally to play in an administration—were Branch a sort of informal adviser, as was the case with several members of FDR's brain trust or (for that matter) Schlesinger, who served as a ready sounding board for the New Frontier packaging of the Kennedy administration. But inevitably, Branch's rooting interest in the Clinton White House overruns his more fastidious scholarly quest of "storing memories for history's future." Early in Clinton's first administration, for instance, the White House is keen to broker some viable scheme to return Haiti's exiled, democratically elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, back into power, and Branch, a longtime supporter of Haitian political reform, volunteers to serve as a go-between in negotiations. He ends up preparing a letter dictated by Aristide's lawyer agreeing to an international coalition ensuring his return to the presidency without bloodshed, and then tracking it up the diplomatic food chain from national security adviser Anthony Lake to First Lady Hillary Clinton on through to the president. The president, whom Branch rouses from bed, is recovering from a bruising round of negotiations over Bosnia and trying to subdue a nasty case of conjunctivitis. It's the sort of errand—nobly conceived and fruitfully dispatched though it was—that probably would have made Arthur Schlesinger blanch.

Much of *The Clinton Tapes* oscillates around odd gray areas like this, with Branch advising Clinton on campaign themes and State of the Union addresses, once even going so far as to deliver a personal note to Clinton—composed on the eve of Branch's departure for Haiti in the company of a State Department delegation—warning him to "guard relentlessly against effects of a recurring dark mood that may endanger your chance for both historic and personal triumph." That melancholy outlook, Branch's letter continued, stems from "your biggest weakness…a tendency to lump 'the press' together with your political opponents."

This was no doubt sound counsel—especially in view of the many stretches of *The Clinton Tapes* during which the president rails about the unfairness of the scandal-addled media. But one is hard pressed to think of even Clinton's most trusted in-house advisers offering such blunt appraisals of his governing style and prospects for greatness. At such moments, Branch seems much less a Schlesinger than a Boswell—and even then, he plainly lacks Boswell's eye for his biographical subject's many foibles and imperfections. Instead he marvels at Clinton's "grit and instinct" in navigating new relations with Boris Yeltsin's post-Soviet Russia and frets over Clinton's "lonely foreboding" on the verge of his 1994 decision to invade Haiti to ensure Aristide's return (a decision that Branch subsequently applauds in a congratulatory fax). As he dictates his recollections of an especially charged session with the president, Branch pulls away from the onrushing wonderment of it all to note, "I could only regret that my dictation summary wasn't able to capture his bursting trails of rich language." As Clinton awaits final word on whether his unpopular decision to proceed with massive NATO air attacks on the Serbian strongholds in Kosovo will yield a peace accord, Branch notes that the president "quivered with restrained excitement, like a racehorse in the gate."

The real problem with Branch's unqualified admiration for his subject doesn't so much arise from the tiresome nonissue of the "bias" employed by this or that interlocutor of power. Rather, it's that Branch's adulation all too often stills his voice before gaping contradictions in the president's political self-image and ideological makeup. For instance, not long after the landslide election of the Gingrich Congress's Republican majority in 1994, Clinton sketches out his tactical response: a Middle Class Bill of Rights, predicated on targeted tax cuts to salve the rampant antigovernment senti-

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ment in the electorate. Reviewing the beatings he took on healthcare reform and the tax hike to remedy the deficits bequeathed by the George H.W. Bush White House, Clinton explained to Branch (who offered a characteristically tepid objection to the cuts as a grievous conceptual downgrading of the original Bill of Rights) that GOP "distortions deprived him of public credit for the budget achievement while torpedoing his health bill to boot. He dissected these lessons, then abruptly reversed course to embrace the propaganda. He would imitate Republican salesmanship to give the voters a borrowed gift. To do so, he would make middle-class tax cuts the centerpiece of his legislative program in the upcoming State of the Union Address."

And so he did—replete with the sound bite that "the era of big government is over," a concession of ideological turf so stunning that the editors of *The Weekly Standard* characterized it with a gloating two-word cover headline: "We Win." Yet in Branch's chronicle, that selfsame cynical GOP mimic turns up a scant forty pages later, seconding Hillary's assessment that "Democrats were afraid to stand up" to GOP mischaracterizations of deficit politics, pouting that not a single Democratic House member had called to congratulate Clinton on a major budget speech. (That aside, in turn, yields an appraisal from Hillary of the party's then–majority leader in the House, who turned down a call from Clinton about the speech: "Gephardt is an asshole.")

Similarly, when discussing the court proceedings concerning the horrifying case of James Byrd Jr., an African-American man who died in Jasper, Texas, after being tied to a pickup truck and dragged behind it for three miles, Clinton perks up when Branch notes that the convicting jury in the capital case was mostly white. That was good, the president replied—"he perceived a side benefit for the death penalty in the fair and impartial conviction of white supremacists for capital crimes against black victims. Such progress would reduce the empirical bias in executions—a victimization by race, controlling for all other factors—which could answer a principal line of argument against capital punishment." The callousness of this appraisal—essentially an argument that equitably administered racial justice is a particular boon when it permits the state to slaughter more convicts—is especially striking, coming as it does from a politician who elected not to stop the execution of a mentally impaired black Arkansas inmate named Ricky Ray Rector (who declared his intent to save part of his last meal "for later") as a campaign stunt during the 1992 Democratic primaries, to fend off "soft on crime" charges from rivals in hard-fought moderate and conservative states. Branch, an unparalleled chronicler of the modern moral crusade for racial justice, only notes with typical diffidence that he watched this monologue unspool "to my discomfort."

Discomfort doesn't begin to capture the mood in sessions devoted to the president's affair with Monica Lewinsky. "I think I just cracked," was Clinton's appraisal of his conduct. "He felt sorry for himself," Branch notes in a world-class understatement, and then reels off the bewildering litany of culprits the president blamed for the dalliance. "When this thing started with Lewinsky in 1995, he had gone through a bad run of people dying at the start—his mother, Vince Foster, Yitzhak Rabin—plus the mean-spirited investigations of him and Hillary and everybody else. Oh, and they ran over him with the 'Contract With America' and took the Congress. He had just cracked. He said he could have done worse. He could have blown something up." But in lieu of plumbing the psyche of a president openly pondering military force as an antidote to political setbacks, sudden deaths and special-prosecutor slights (or indeed, a president whose form of cracking under such scrutiny is to give his pursuers exactly the base conduct they're looking for), Branch again laments the damage wrought on the president's image for posterity. After Clinton "had come so close to proving all the scandals baseless," he ruefully tells Clinton, "Lewinsky alone vindicated cynicism."

Clinton comes off as the most media-obsessed president since Richard Nixon.

But things were nowhere near that simple. Clinton could have followed his lawyers' advice and settled the Paula Jones sexual harassment suit—the underlying proceeding that permitted independent counsel Kenneth Starr to employ Lewinsky's affair with the president as a perjury trap in the Whitewater inquiry. Indeed, one of the many ironies of the overlapping scandals was that the Jones suit got thrown out of court midway through the Lewinsky inquiry—but by then it was the behavior of Bill Clinton, not the architects of the Contract With America or the assassin of Rabin, that stoked the labors of his many political and legal pursuers. One of course can't expect Branch's real-time discussions with the president to get to the bottom of what remains an unfathomable, and perhaps pathological, feature of the man's character. But it's surpassingly odd for Branch to shrug off the exchange—"we were briefly a miserable sight"—and then launch his next chapter with an account of a spirited game of hearts with the Clintons and George McGovern after a black-tie affair Branch attended with his wife, Christy (by then a speechwriter for Hillary). I guess that's what everyone at the time meant by "moving on."

For all the distasteful impressions kicked up in such interludes, the Clinton in Branch's behind-the-scenes account comes off best, oddly enough, as an international power broker. His tormented search for a viable international coalition to stanch the horrific ethnic violence in Bosnia—seeking to contain cynical posturing from Western powers such as France—points up the genuine uncertainties of piecing together a post–cold war global consensus on humanitarian intervention. Clinton's successful peace overtures in Northern Ireland, meanwhile, show him as a resolute and far-seeing interlocutor in a dismal conflict, understanding that, as he tells Branch, "in that part of the world… public wisdom ran well ahead of the politicians." And his desperate efforts to salvage a lasting agreement out of the Oslo Accords show Clinton testing the outer reaches of imaginative diplomacy—carving out face-saving opportunity after face-saving opportunity for Yasir Arafat and Rabin's successors in Israel, Shimon Peres, Benjamin Netanyahu and Ehud Barak, to trade land for peace while playing to their hardline constituencies back home. Of course, these overtures succumb, as all proposed deals before and since have, to the obdurate delusions on the ground generated on both sides since Israel's occupation of Gaza and the West Bank began in 1967. But Clinton exhausts all manner of diplomatic end-run strategies to keep the talks going; at one impasse, over Netanyahu's petty and self-defeating refusal to permit Palestinians to erect industrial parks in Gaza out of overblown fears that the resources would be diverted to terrorist activity, Branch records that Clinton was "near despair.… I could not remember seeing him this upset."

Yet even on the foreign stage, Clinton could all too readily let his domestic political preoccupations crowd out the larger picture.

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As Secretary of State Warren Christopher continues thrashing out the Dayton framework for a Bosnian peace, for example, Clinton frets over the political beating he'd take with the resumption of war. "When the killing starts, it's bad for my administration," he fumes—a less-than-statesmanlike posture for someone hammering out a bid to stem the spread of genocide in the West. More oddly still, when the NATO airstrikes on Kosovo are about to yield a ceasefire agreement, Clinton's initial appraisal to Branch is that "Kosovo would be the first American war without a cheerleader in the press"—as though that consideration alone were a measure of the mission's virtue.

Indeed, throughout Branch's chronicle, Clinton comes off as the most media-obsessed chief executive this country has had since Richard Nixon. To be sure, the Clinton-era press had an unusually vacuous, content-challenged appetite for any whiff of scandal, from Whitewater to "Travelgate" to the Wen Ho Lee fiasco. But when a Clinton ally as stout as Branch is driven to draft a personal note to Clinton to tamp down his tantrums against the press, the president is clearly struggling with an immense loss of his sense of proportion. As Nixon had before him, Clinton complains bitterly that journalists are invested in misguided perceptions of his political nature that overlook his true character. "How could the initiator of lasting controversy be portrayed as a changeling?" he laments to Branch at one point. "How could he take so many unpopular stands and yet stand for nothing? If anything, he stood for too much."

Such complaints have to leave anyone with an intact memory of Clinton's actual governing style more than a little slack-jawed. Our New Democratic leader did, in fact, make a persistent habit of trimming policy directives and political will to prevailing ideological winds. Clinton signed the GOP Congress's Defense of Marriage Act, for instance, for no other reason than to secure his re-election. He did so in an after-midnight, closed-work session, so as to symbolize his abstract disapproval of the measure while casting aside the civil rights of a long-persecuted minority—a fastidious display that did not, of course, prevent him from airing campaign ads touting his support of DOMA on evangelical radio stations in swing states. With similar self-serving brio, Clinton slashed federal income support, endorsing the Gingrich Congress's version of welfare reform—and then campaigned on a promise to "fix" the very legislation he had signed into law.

But such gambits scarcely register in a book that records outburst after outburst from the nation's most powerful leader inveighing against the concerted persecution campaigns that were supposedly stymieing his good will—and spreading toxic "cynicism" throughout the American political culture as a woeful side effect. In one show of high-Nixonian dudgeon, Clinton even decries a far-reaching ideological press conspiracy to fan the flames of the Whitewater scandal. "The whole thing was stacked against him," Branch writes, "nor was it an accident that these persecutions had reared up just in time to spoil his hard-won political gains." In a strategy session with a Whitewater lawyer Branch finds himself listening in on, Clinton urges that the administration go on the warpath in striking down scandal-mongering from the press. "Both to me and to his lawyer on the phone, he railed against the stance of patient cooperation. He called it naïve, vowing to fight. 'I'm tired of this limp-dick shit'.... Clinton pleaded for an aggressive army. 'I want somebody to stand up to these people,' he cried. 'This is ridiculous.'"

It's easy to be lulled by such outcries—the press *is* besotted with inert scandal coverage, and Starr, together with scores of professional Clinton haters on the right, *did* manipulate those appetites to keep the appearance of chronic wrongdoing percolating throughout the Clinton years. But for the possessor of the presidency's bully pulpit to insist that the "whole thing was stacked against him" strains even the most stalwart kind of progressive credulity. No American president could ever be that powerless; take the executive branch's own approval of the Whitewater independent counsel's open-ended inquiry (a move that Hillary, a far savvier attorney and a veteran of the House impeachment inquiry in the Nixon years, forcefully opposed). And Hillary herself mounted the aggressive counterassault Clinton longed for at the outset of the Lewinsky scandal, railing against the "vast right-wing conspiracy"—together with no end of surrogate Clinton defenders who tirelessly worked the media rounds on Clinton's behalf, until he hung them all out to dry with his grand jury testimony conceding that he had misled the country about the affair. There's a fitting kind of symmetry in the odd sight that Branch reports during a session with the president as Middle East negotiators try yet again to hammer out a framework for peace at the 2000 Camp David talks: Clinton is relaxing with his daughter during a lunch break, wearing a T-shirt with the legend "Trust me, I'm a reporter"—a slogan that has since been adopted by professional media-bias spotters on the right who fancy themselves victims of an Obama-besotted press conspiracy. The players always change in the media grievance business, but the mottoes remain the same.

In the cold afterglow of the aughts, as a debt-defiled nation strains to believe in a jobs-challenged recovery predicated mainly on bank bailouts, one gaping exception to the all-purpose theory of Clinton media persecution is impossible to miss. The Clinton administration got the freest possible ride from the media in economic affairs, once Clinton did his appointed New Democrat duty, scotching his long-promised first-term stimulus package in favor of a deficit-reducing tax plan and finding common cause with Fed chief Alan Greenspan to manage financial policy in the interests of the investor class. Those critical concessions, combined with the gossamer paper wealth kicked up in the Web 1.0 economy, had the entire financial press swooning in adoration of the White House's grown-up managerial savvy. The DLC-groomed president relished that sort of approbation, noting to Branch at one point during budget negotiations with Congressional Republicans that "they hate getting schooled on the real world by rich Democrats," such as his Goldman Sachs–trained treasury secretary, Robert Rubin. When Clinton signed into law the two pieces of deregulatory financial legislation that made the 2008 economic meltdown not only possible but a near certainty—the 1999 Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act, which smashed the barrier separating investment and commercial banking that FDR's administration had enforced with the 1933 Glass-Steagall Act to prevent a repeat of the massive bank failures of the Great Depression, and the Commodity Futures Modernization Act of 2000, which cleared the way for exotic derivative products like credit default swaps—only cranky economic wonks and marginal leftists raised much of a fuss.

Clinton pauses ever so briefly in the sessions that make up *The Clinton Tapes* to mention Rubin and his quarterbacking of economic policy. The occasion is the secretary's resignation in 1999 to return to the moneyed spires of Wall Street, where he landed a roving executive post at Citigroup, the newly reconfigured investment-cum-commercial banking colossus that could exist, legally, only under the Gramm-Leach-Bliley law, which Rubin aggressively lobbied for from his Treasury perch. Only that's not how Clinton apostrophizes the great man. He notes that Rubin "left the opulent world of investment banking to defend a vast, endangered middle class"—and that he's quite grateful for Rubin's

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diehard loyalty throughout the Lewinsky affair. Here, clearly, is a man with "a sense for what mattered," and who not surprisingly endorsed the view that "politics was a distasteful scrum."

More recently, of course, the high-minded former Treasury guru has presided over the collapse of his beloved new hybrid megabank—even though he's netted more than $110 million in bonuses as its stock has been devalued by a factor of ten, from $50 to $5 a share. If that—and the allied multiple meltdowns that have besieged Rubin's re-engineered finance sector—represents the fruit of a master plan to rescue the "vast, endangered middle class," I guess we should be grateful the guy didn't deliberately attempt to lay waste the economy. Then again, it's hard to see how the results would be much different in that scenario. If granting free rein to such plainly interested parties is truly the price of securing a modern, management-minded Democratic Party and conquering "cynicism" in our ever-delicate public discourse, why, then, bring on the distasteful scrums and the scandal-minded press. But then again, why trust me? I'm a reporter. ■

THE DOROTHEA TANNING COLLECTION AND ARCHIVE

Tempête en jaune (Tempest in Yellow), 1956, by Dorothea Tanning, from the collection of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts

Her Wild Entire

by BARRY SCHWABSKY

In 1944 Max Ernst, the renowned German painter then living in exile in New York City, introduced a young artist's first solo exhibition at the Julien Levy Gallery with these words: "I like the work of Dorothea Tanning because the domain of the marvelous is her native country; because in her audacious enterprise to paint an intimate and dramatized biography of the universe, the tumults of the child's soul, the mysteries of love and the whole monstrosity which envelopes the ages of reason, she finds her new, spontaneous and persuasive means of figuration." The gallery was the stronghold of Surrealism in the New World, and Ernst, of course, was one of the movement's princelings. So it's surprising—and more prophetic than Ernst might have imagined—that he went on to assert that "she refuses to take the vow of obedience to the exigencies of an orthodox surrealism."

How did an aspiring 34-year-old artist from Galesburg, Illinois—Carl Sandburg country—come to find herself in such company? A few years earlier, having already decided that Chicago would not be the theater of her aspirations—"the whole scene struck me as a kind of tableau vivant that was to be gazed at, taken in quickly before the curtain fell"—she'd bought a one-way bus ticket to New York. There, as it appears from her autobiography, *Between Lives*, published in 2001, chance encounters could become fateful. "A gaunt, intense young man with an enormous Nietzschean mustache" holding forth in front of *Guernica*—presumably at the Museum of Modern Art, where it was shown in 1939, though Tanning recalls it perhaps being at the Paul Rosenberg Gallery—was none other than Arshile Gorky. He too would later become one of Julien Levy's artists. "Meeting rarely," Tanning recalls, "we were never more than polite acquaintances." But the vividness of her recollection suggests the deep impression he must have made; his art, too, if I'm not mistaken, would have an effect on hers, but only decades later.

Perhaps the most fateful of Tanning's encounters of the mid '30s was not with a person but with an exhibition. It was the "Fantastic Art, Dada, and Surrealism" show of 1936 at what was then still known as the Modern (not yet rebranded MoMA), one of Alfred Barr's pioneering surveys. For Tanning, it was "the real explosion, rocking me on my run-over heels," showing her "the infinitely faceted world I must have been waiting for." The force of that explosion set her to picturing her own infinitely faceted world of desire, but who knows if or when or where her depiction of that world would have been seen had it not been for one more stroke of luck. She'd been supporting herself doing fashion illustrations for Macy's. Her boss must have had a keen eye for art; in any case, he was well connected, for it was he who suggested to Levy that he check out Tanning's paintings.

She had only two to show—and one of them is still probably her most famous. You can see it today in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. *Birthday* (1942) is a self-portrait. It depicts a beautiful young woman of deeply serious mien, wearing a strange, breast-bearing outfit that seems to be made partly of roots, standing in an empty apartment. The apartment is quite ordinary except that it seems to go on forever. Ah, those prewar buildings! She holds a door open, not with any apparent intention to pass through it, since she is facing away from it, but in order to show the viewer what is on the other side: more doors, doors upon doors, to infinity. At her foot stands a hippogriff, a charmingly ugly little beast resembling the one in Ingres's *Roger Delivering Angelica* (1819), which would also later find its way into John Ashbery's great poem "Soonest Mended": "And Angelica, in the Ingres painting, was considering/The colorful but small monster near her toe, as though wondering/whether forgetting/The whole thing might not, in the end, be the only solution." But unlike Ingres's heroine, pathetically but fetchingly chained to her rock until the arrival of her

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Set Apart

Set apart
from the compound
friction of forest,
a rough-barked
bur oak,
mostly trunk,
outlives
its understory.

A sapling in 1700,
it rose like smoke
from leaf litter,
a totem for those
who told tales
vertically,
every episode
the offspring
of earth and sky.

Carotenoids flare
through its vascular system
in slow time,
releasing aromas
of black tea
and tobacco.

Winter-hardened,
the oak endures,
a column supporting
nothing but its own
fixed extension.

The fine point
of a feeding warbler—
a drifting spark
or cursor—
ghosts its crown.

DEVIN JOHNSTON

knight with his lance, the subject of *Birthday* is not "always having to be rescued/On the brink of destruction." There may be an indefinable air of melancholy about her solemn face, but she holds open the door to the realm of dreams. If Mr. Viewer thinks those bare breasts signify availability, he'd better think again. Tanning's heroine is a figure of power.

No wonder Levy was impressed. Surrealist painting such as Tanning had encountered six years earlier at the Modern assumed diverse forms, but she had taken one of them—a kind of drily scrupulous realism used to describe fantastic, even self-contradictory realities so as to give them an air of unimpeachable verisimilitude—and brought it to a rare pitch of intensity while giving it a content it had never had before: a female consciousness of full autonomy. The studio visit had a fairy-tale ending. "From now on you're in my gallery," Levy told her. "When you have enough we will show them."

In her painting, Tanning opens the door, but it was Levy who opened the door to a glittering world of displaced European artists and writers—Ernst, André Breton, Marcel Duchamp—and their American friends and supporters, such as Peggy Guggenheim (then briefly married to Ernst), Robert Motherwell and Joseph Cornell. In 1946, in a double ceremony with Man Ray and Juliet Browner, Ernst and Tanning married. By this time the charmed circle of Surrealism in exile was dispersing; many returned to Paris, but Tanning and Ernst lit out for Sedona, Arizona, and then, a few years later, for France. They touched down in Paris, shuttled between there and Arizona and ended up settling in Huismes, a village in the Loire Valley. Soon after her husband's death in 1976, Tanning returned to New York, where she still lives.

Tanning will turn 100 later this year. The impending centenary gives one pause; it's hard not to wonder why this remarkable artist is not better known. Will she get the celebration she deserves?

I certainly hope so, but I can't help suspecting that the very thing that gave Tanning her happy life—being taken up by a circle of artists who were already established, who were a generation older than she—has been an impediment to seeing her accomplishment clearly. She had become, as she herself knew, "an artist living in the shadow of a great man." Of course, this is also part of what makes her life historically interesting today, what gives her story an even greater reach than her astonishing 100 years: she is a living connection to a group of artists who were born in the nineteenth century. But to some extent the connection cut her off from the artists of her own generation. Turning again to *Between Lives*, a glance through its index reveals no mention of names like Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, Lee Krasner or Mark Rothko; yet hers was precisely the generation of the Abstract Expressionists. Nor do the French artists of her generation, whom she could have met after the move from Sedona, play any part in her memories—no Jean Dubuffet or Nicolas de Staël. To a great extent, Tanning had been sidetracked by her attachment to the generation that had established itself before the war.

Of course, there were obvious stylistic reasons for Tanning's marginalization. The postwar period saw the triumph of abstraction. And although neither Pollock nor de Kooning definitively eschewed figurative imagery, and still less did their French contemporaries, the kind of figuration that entered their work was primal, impulsive, ideogrammatic—worlds away from the high finish of a painting like *Birthday*. This was the era when Clement Greenberg was campaigning against what he called "literary" painting—by which he meant, most prominently, the kind of Surrealism that Tanning was practicing, as did Ernst, in his view—along with the "Neo-Romanticism" that followed in its train, such as in the paintings of Eugene Berman. "The Surrealist image," he charged, "provides painting with new anecdotes to illustrate, just as current events supply new topics to the political cartoonist, but of itself it does not charge painting with a new subject matter. On the contrary, it has promoted the rehabilitation of academic art under a new literary disguise." The Abstract Expressionists, like many other abstract artists of the postwar era, took part of their inspiration from Surrealism, to be sure, but from a different side of it altogether, that of Hans Arp, André Masson and Joan Miró, which is to say from what Breton had called "pure psychic automatism."

Greenberg had a point, though in retrospect one can't help but notice the narrowness of his sense of the new. Tanning did have something fresh to contribute—as had Ernst and some of the other Surrealists Greenberg censured. With his characteristic shrewdness, Greenberg hit on what makes such art powerful, at least when it is as good as Tanning's is at her best; but he couched his observation in a tone of offhand belittlement rather than of appreciation: "The artist shows us how he would prefer life to look or how—as children

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do—he would prefer to be frightened." There are many different things that art can be and do, but an art that would permanently renounce experiences and desires so primal has matured one step too far—it's moribund. But still and all, you can see how a painter like Tanning would have seemed to many of her strongest contemporaries to be part of their art's past more than of its future.

Eventually, she must have sensed this. Sometime after the move to France, something changed in Tanning's work. Writing in *Between Lives*, more than forty years after the fact, she seems to see herself coming around to something like a Greenbergian view on what she had been doing. "I began to chafe just a little at the reliance on precisely painted elements of the natural world in order to present an incongruity. The peerless Dalí, for instance, wasn't he a later Maxfield Parrish but with a different imagination?" Greenberg had cited Meissonier, Ford Madox Brown and Greuze as technical comparators; Tanning's idea is the same, except that her comparison makes the point even more bluntly: what had chafed her was an illustrative art. She was ready to shed a skin. "Gradually," she recalled, "in looking at how many ways paint can flow onto canvas, I began to long for letting it have more freedom."

In the paintings she began making after the mid-'50s—a good example would be *Insomnias* (1957), now in the Moderna Museet in Stockholm—the figurative elements are still there, but as features of a different kind of space. The work is inconceivable without the precedents of Cubism and Abstract Expressionism—the late work of that gaunt, extravagantly mustached Gorky might still have been in the back of Tanning's mind—yet it is rather different from either Cubism or Abstract Expressionism as it had ever been practiced before. The figure itself is not broken up analytically in the Cubist manner, and yet it is uneasily fitted in among the luminous facetings and nebulosities of an entirely abstract space made of sweet-and-sour colors. "I wanted to lead the eye," the artist has written, "into spaces that hid, revealed, transformed all at once and where there would be some never-before-seen image, as if it had appeared with no help from me." Ernst must have been amazed as he watched Tanning turn into the truly unorthodox and disobedient Surrealist he had seen in her some fifteen years before. These paintings were, once again, a little untimely. Their originality was not the one her contemporaries were looking for. But today it looks quietly prophetic. I can imagine painters like Cecily Brown or Inka Essenhigh nodding to them in mutual recognition.

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Tanning's art developed greatly over the following decades, yet a work like *Insomnias*, a genuine self-reinvention, represents the true beginning for all that followed. With time, the paintings become less brittle and hectic than *Insomnias* is and probably had to be, gaining in breadth and lyricism. Yet painting has hardly been Tanning's sole endeavor. In the early '70s she suddenly spent half a decade on sculpture. What I'd never have guessed is that this was inspired by a performance of Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Hymnen*, his massive fantasia on worldwide national anthems, which, according to *Between Lives*, "incredibly but clearly showed me what I had to do. Spinning among the unearthly sounds…were the earthy, even organic shapes that I would make, had to make, out of cloth and wool." These organic shapes made out of fabric, mutant humanoid presences sometimes half-melded with the furniture that supports them, recall the phantasmic bodies, at once fragmentary and excessive, of her paintings, and to some extent the biomorphic sculpture that her almost exact contemporary Louise Bourgeois had been making since the '60s. But Bourgeois was then using traditional sculptural materials like plaster and marble and did not follow Tanning in the use of fabric until later.

Perhaps more surprising than that fruitful but passing sidestep into sculpture has been Tanning's more recent flowering as a writer. I am thinking not only of the autobiography that I have been drawing on throughout this essay, a work of marvelous style, and its earlier version, *Birthday* (1986), but also of her venture into fiction, *Chasm* (2004). Then again, the turn to prose should not be so surprising, since her first important prose work, the short novel *Abyss*, published in 1977, is said to have been written thirty years earlier. That book, whose title presages the later one, of which it might be a sort of first draft, seems to have been quietly dropped from Tanning's official history, but it suggests that her literary inclination is of long standing. The eerie Gothic atmosphere that the tales share is undoubtedly what one might expect of a Surrealist, but their fixation on the figure of the innocently destructive girl is distinct from anything the movement's male protagonists would have conjured up. Still, they have affinities with a work like Julien Gracq's *Château d'Argol* (1938), of which Walter Benjamin noted, "The ebbing tide of Surrealism has washed up a strange shell on the desolate shore of literature."

Tanning's poems, by contrast, would never be identified as the work of a Surrealist or former Surrealist. Her engagement with poetry was sparked by a friendship with James Merrill: "Jimmy *was* poetry—the palpable, unsparing embodiment of poetry." Her approach to the art reflects the exquisite formal wit and poignancy that is so memorable in his writing, with what Denis Donoghue called its "net of loose talk tightening to verse," but she is more than his worthy student. As with everything else she's turned her hand to, she's made poetry her own. I'm tempted simply to end with my favorite of her poems, the one that opens her collection *A Table of Content* (2004), teasingly titled "Are You?":

If an expatriate is, as I believe,
  someone
who never forgets for an instant
being one,
then, no.

But, if knowing that you always
tote your country around
with you, your roots,
a lump

like a soul that will never leave you
stranded in alien subsets of
yourself, or your wild
entire;

that being elsewhere packs a vertigo,
a tightrope side you cannot
pass up, another way
to show

how not to break your pretty neck
falling on skylights:
reward-laden
mirages;

then, yes. All homes are home;
  mirages
everywhere. Aside from
gravity, there are no
limits,

never were, nor will there ever be,
no here and there to foil
your lotus-dreaming
legend.

Stay on the planet, if you can. It isn't
all that chilly and what's more,
grows warmer by the
minute.

Beautifully measured, the poem moves step by step into ever more unexpected terrain in which the seeming reassurance of "All homes are home" becomes a promise of never-ending displacement. And the sting in the final stanzas resonates all the more ominously today.

The advice of a woman in her 90s to "stay on the planet" is to be taken seriously: it comes from someone who has been unusually successful in staying but who is also likely to be facing the possibility of not staying with particular vividness. I'm glad Tanning has continued to follow her own advice. I've never met her, but simply knowing of her existence expands my sense of the possible in art and life—which is why I don't, after all, quite wish to end here.

I'm still thinking about the question I raised earlier. Will Tanning be honored as she should be in this, her centenary year? The great man in whose shadow she stood has himself grown a bit shadowy. Now it's time to shine a different light on Tanning. The most recent exhibition devoted to her, which took place last fall at the Kent Gallery in New York City, was truly a delight, but I couldn't help reflecting on the fact that instead of showcasing Tanning it focused on "Dorothea Tanning and Friends." The exhibition presented her art in the context that nourished it, alongside colleagues like George Balanchine, Alexander Calder, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Alberto Giacometti, René Magritte, Lee Miller and Meret Oppenheim, as well as others I've already mentioned—and, of course, Ernst. Many of the works came from Tanning's collection. The gallery became a box of memories, and for those of us old enough to be Tanning's great-grandchildren, it was a box of vicarious memories colored by a shade of envy. "What a fairyland we find ourselves in," read the first line of a typed and collaged letter on blue paper, written to Tanning on December 29, 1947, and signed "Joseph Cornell." He's talking about a snowfall in Queens, but his words drifted over the exhibition as a whole. The Tannings on view were mostly from the 1940s and as magical as ever; there were just a few glimpses of her subsequent development (a painting from 1977; a fabric sculpture from 1969, reworked in 2008). All of them made me want to see more, to forget about the friends for a while so that I could see more clearly how the artist's work lasts above and beyond her milieu. And then I got a little mad at Tanning too, not right away but when I read *Between Lives* and, for all the pleasure it gave me—as a piece of writing, few artists' autobiographies surpass it—realized that it told me so much less about her art than about her life and the many curious people, not all of them famous, who populated it. Well, fair enough; that's what the title promised. But it made me want to shout as if she were in the room, "Don't be so modest! Your life is wonderful, but I know your art is more important!" Let's not be fooled by her reticence any longer. ■

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The Escape Hatch

by NICK STILLMAN

In a memorable scene from the biopic *Houdini*, released in 1953, the illusionist's wife bemoans a performance at which the audience pelted her husband with tomatoes: "Nobody seems to want your magic, Harry." It's a gut punch to the young magician: an unwanted magician is one in need of a career change. As truth-bending as the film infamously was, Bess's lament feels plausible. Illusionist magic is gimmickry. Escaping while handcuffed from a locked box dropped into the bay, on the other hand—that requires dexterity and stamina, total physical control. Houdini's real trick was to unlock the organic magic of the human body, and doing so over and over made him an icon. But nobody seemed to realize that Houdini's hands were tied in more ways than one. The bawdy throngs who paid pennies to witness his death-defying acts demanded increasingly riskier antics. Houdini obliged, and by the time of his "buried alive" stunts, his lust to delight had boxed him into a corner; he had rendered his past work obsolete.

Last year marked the twentieth anniversary of the disappearance from the art world of the artist Cady Noland. While Houdini pushed himself until the very end—dying of peritonitis a week after his final performance in Detroit, in 1926—Noland simply walked away from her craft without explanation, an artist still very much "in demand." Everyone had wanted her magic. Noland was born in 1956 and grew up in New York City, the daughter of the highly regarded "Color Field" abstract painter Kenneth Noland. She likely began showing her work in the '80s; the earliest piece I'm aware of is a no-longer-extant Rauschenbergian combine from 1984 with the chilly title *Total Institution*. Objects like a telephone receiver, clips, a toilet seat and a rubber chicken hang from a wall-mounted horizontal rack. During her brief career Noland's gaze would remain fixated on institutional control and the American public spectacle of cruelty, and her aesthetic would grow increasingly embittered, clinical and mean.

Counting her debut solo show in 1988 at the nonprofit gallery White Columns in New York City, Noland had at least six solo shows over the next two years, a glut even by the standards of today's über-productive artists. During an era when art got "loose" ("scatter art" became acceptable lingo for describing installation art of the late '80s and early '90s), Noland's tightened up. Her installations were typically amalgamations of hardware found in stores and on the city's sidewalks—not sculptures in the traditional sense but exercises in arrangement. She had an affinity for gleaming aluminum, chrome and other metals—some seemingly detached from machines and appliances—as well as the seedy Americana of the lower classes. Both were stand-ins for a national culture that was slipping and had been stripped of its vigor.

Chainsaw Cut Cowboy Head (1990), by Cady Noland

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, CHICAGO. GIFT OF SUSAN AND LEWIS MANILOW.

Despite a doggedly clinical aesthetic, Noland liked junk—spills, ooze, trash tossed from moving vehicles, wrecked cars and incomplete roadside construction. "It's an American trip to take huge joy in wasting things," she said in 1994. James Dean's death was interesting not only because he was James Dean but because it "highlights the trashing of appealing supplies," namely metal. "The joy in joyriding is the joy of damaging major metal." The title of her 1994 interview with Mark Kremer and Camiel van Winkel is "Metal Is a Major Thing, and a Major Thing to Waste," a direct quote of hers.

Metal was the foundation of her installations and the surface onto which she had been transferring images at least since 1989. When she produced silkscreens of murdered or scorned media celebrities (Abraham Lincoln, Betty Ford, Lee Harvey Oswald), she transferred the images from mass media sources onto aluminum or other metals and leaned the thing right against the wall; as she once said in an interview, she was interested in how consumer society reduces people to objects. Pieces like *Booth—The Big Plunge* and *I Brushed My Teeth This Morning* casually used images of incidental artifacts—the set of clothes worn by John Wilkes Booth on the day he murdered Lincoln or a page from a history book about the incident—and blew them up (hyperexposed them) on metal sheets. Sometimes she would print on unusually shiny metal so that a viewer's reflection in these metallic rectangles would be comically distorted, as in a fun-house mirror. Once—again at White Columns—Noland suspended a metal pole in the door frame, blocking the entryway. A miniature American flag hung limply from the pole, a bluntly abject manifestation of patriotism. Along those lines, she also began building stockades. If the Pop generation preceding her used national symbols as question marks (or dollar signs), Noland used them as ironic exclamation points.

Her multiplatform project *Towards a Metalanguage of Evil* is—given the absence of any substantive literature about her work—the best primary account of her philosophy. It was conceived as a slide lecture and delivered at a 1987 academic conference called "The

Nick Stillman, a writer and artist based in Brooklyn, is the managing editor of BOMB.

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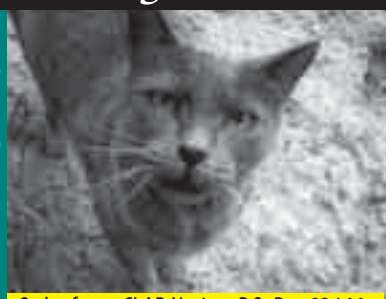

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Expression of Evil," sponsored by West Georgia College; Noland later transformed it into an illustrated essay published in Spanish and English in the fourth volume of an obscure magazine called *Balcon*. In imperious and poetic prose she relates her research on psychopathology, specifically its troubling normalization in the "successful" American male, whom she likens to serial killers in their Social Darwinian aggression. The illustrations are a mix of contemporary art (Wallace & Donahue, Sherrie Levine, Peter Nagy, Steven Parrino and Barbara Kruger) that allegorizes the psychopathic "game" and chilling stock images of transportation disasters—prurient thrills, à la J.G. Ballard's *Crash*. "There is a meta-game available for use in the United States," the essay begins, before untangling the "hypno-whirlpool" of a type of pathological selfishness. Noland's psychopath cunningly embarks on an "information hunt," closing in on a "mark" with exploitable needs by falsely assuming the guise of a social role he knows the mark will find alluring: "The psychopath is always wearing a mask except when openly aggressing." She notes that the denouement is most spectacular when it affects a group that assumes itself impervious to such terrorism—politicians, celebrities—and this is where *Towards a Metalanguage of Evil* begins to take shape as an eerie metaphor for her career, especially her decision to end it.

Was Noland paranoid or just realistic? Her definition of the pathological mirrors free-market, kill-or-be-killed American values; for her, symptoms of the pathology of the American psyche are revelry in waste (both stuff and behavior) and the reduction of death and misfortune to consumable forms of entertainment. Noland wasn't exactly antibourgeois like, say, the Surrealists. There was nothing educational about her practice; she was more of a nihilist. Career-related celebrity was clearly going to be a problem for an artist like her. Her framing of "success" as founded on manipulation and exploitation would seem to clash with her own taste of it. After Noland's early spate of solo shows, her name was "out there"—she was "hot."

She was selected for the 1991 Whitney Biennial and in 1992 participated in Documenta IX in Kassel, Germany, a mega-exhibition of international contemporary art that takes place every five years. She three-dimensionalized *Towards a Metalanguage of Evil* for Documenta; securing an underground garage for her location, she silkscreened the essay onto panels that lay around in slapdash fashion, and included work by some of the artists she had reproduced in the essay. She added an addendum to the essay called "The Bonsai Effect," in which she broadened her critique of American waste culture, showing how it ensnares nonwhites (who are "kept busy by 'impossible projects'") and women (who waste time and money preserving and decorating themselves). After Documenta her output slowed, and the new work she did make seemed mannered. For a 1993 show at the Dallas Museum of Art she borrowed the museum's wheelchairs and made them available to visitors; doubtlessly she appreciated the wheelchairs' polished chrome. In 1993 and '94 she began making silkscreens of brick walls.

Nobody would care much about the story of an artist slipping through the cracks if she were just any artist. Artists disappear all the time—they run out of money or energy, or people stop wanting to pay for their magic. Noland—like Lee Lozano before her—is still mythical twenty years later because she escaped before her art depreciated. If anything it became tougher, more lacerating and hard-core. What was perhaps her final show, at Switzerland's Migros Museum in 1999, was one of her meanest; she showed large sections of chain-link fencing that demarcated artificially forbidden areas and simultaneously rendered them invisible, the way a construction site's visual chaos can be such an eyesore that it paradoxically becomes invisible to the urban pedestrian. Was Noland suffocated by her disgust with her country? Or, after being in both the Whitney Biennial and Documenta, two of the most visible recurring shows in the world, did she recognize that she was becoming a brand, someone counted on for a quick thrill before being discarded—in other words, a "mark"?

Houdini also spent his last years trapped and tormented by his success. He wouldn't allow himself to depreciate, and this left him acting out a pathetic metaphor: he was a spectacle of public entrapment, his every stunt in its essence an escape from a stockade. Lozano's late work exhibits an obviously declining mental state, largely attributable to her interactions with the art world, closely documented in her late text pieces. When she quit the art world in 1972 she announced it with *Dropout Piece*. Noland did no such thing. She just left the game before the game could leave her. ■

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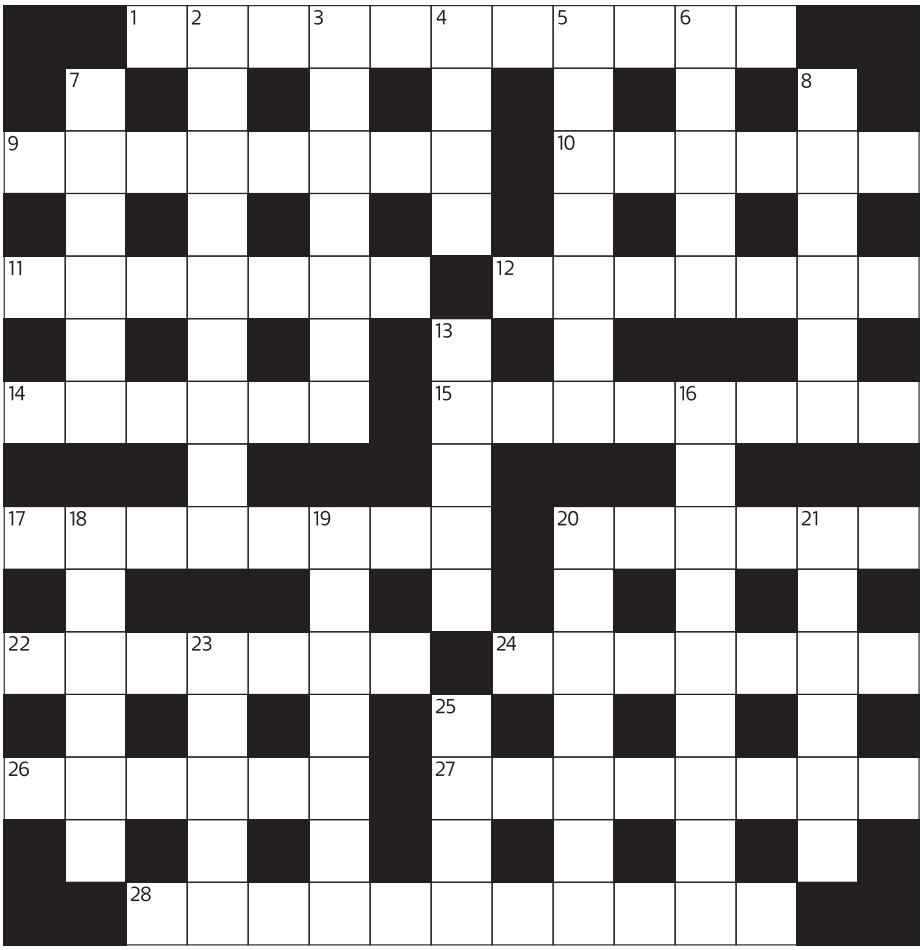

ACROSS

1 How a character of *The Oxbow Incident* was upset making a projection. (11)

9 and **10** Old song as a companion piece to "Dry Bones"? (1,4,3,6)

11 and **12** What the leper properly has. (7,7)

14 They lower the life-boats from them. (6)

15 Rose with 21 down. (8)

17 Leather has bad color, it seems. (8)

20 Sort of basic, when about one of a school's three Indians. (6)

22 Comes out fighting on account of the wisecracks? (7)

24 Part of the liturgy is slowly changing, obviously. (7)

26 One might be found in a ring when 23, but one hears it is to continue stationary. (6)

27 1 across shouldn't get over describing such things. (8)

28 Perhaps prudish, but at least it sounds as though the tie isn't crooked. (6-5)

DOWN

2 Descriptive of Grey's 15. (9)

3 Outbursts that leave the spirit in tatters. (7)

4 How kitty might be made sweet and neat, possibly. (4)

5 Originally a nonbeliever should be moderate about one. (7)

6 This old coin should be easily distinguished. (5)

7 Teddy found it right under him, in *Arsenic and Old Lace*. (6)

8 Confuses, as does port. (6)

13 Shrewd, and able to briefly state the combination. (5)

16 How to shed some light on what they might do to the milk supply? (9)

18 See 23

19 She egged her brother on to vengeance. (7)

20 Not a drum was heard at Sir John Moore's burial here. (7)

21 Supposedly not deep in the skin, especially with 25. (6)

23 and **18** Is it dangerous for a moth to be so like a dizzy blonde? (5-6)

25 Appearing with 23 on the stage notice. (4)

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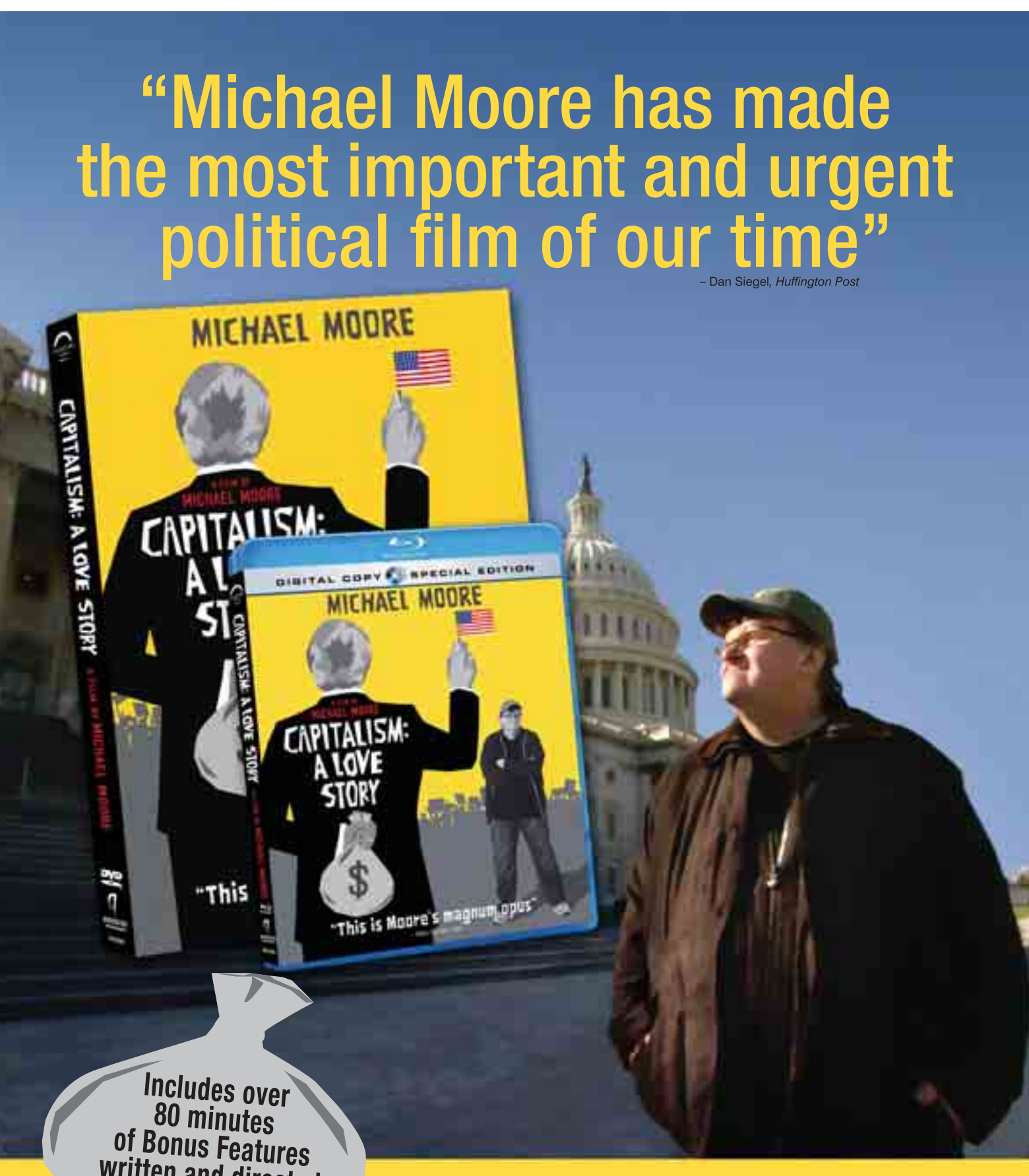

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